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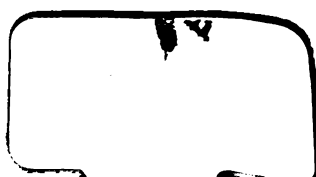
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*Painted by himself.*

**JOHN OPIE. ESQ.**

*Engraved by S. W. Reynolds.*

**LECTURES**  
ON  
**P A I N T I N G,**  
DELIVERED AT  
**THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS:**  
WITH  
A LETTER ON THE PROPOSAL FOR  
A PUBLIC MEMORIAL  
OF  
THE NAVAL GLORY OF GREAT BRITAIN.

BY THE LATE  
**JOHN OPIE, Esq.**  
PROFESSOR IN PAINTING TO THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED,  
A MEMOIR BY MRS. OPIE,  
AND  
OTHER ACCOUNTS OF MR. OPIE'S TALENTS AND CHARACTER.

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## TO THE READER.

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I HAVE referred to the VIIth Number of THE ARTIST so frequently in the following pages, that I thought it necessary to print it at the end of them; nor was I sorry to have an excuse for introducing it into the present work, as I wished that so honourable and so unquestionable a testimony to Mr. Opie's worth, borne by contemporaries of known talents and integrity, should meet the public eye at the same moment with my more partial and consequently less forcible evidence.

AMELIA OPIE.



TO PRINCE HOARE, ESQ.

---

DEAR SIR,

THE task which the desire of my friends and my own sense of duty have at length prevailed on me to undertake, is painful and difficult of execution, however soothing the consciousness of having fulfilled it may in time prove to my feelings.

When you first urged me to do, what perhaps I alone am able to do, namely, to give a full and accurate character of a man neither correctly known, nor justly appretiated but by myself, and those who saw him in his most domestic hours, I shrunk with terror from your proposal;—for I knew, not only that I must be considered as a partial, and therefore a blind narrator, but that my wish to be just and correct, would expose me to the risk of appearing frivolous and minute, while my desire of expressing such feelings only as my readers could “*go along with,*” would lead me on the other hand to incur the danger of being cold and insipid.

B

But all selfish considerations were soon annihilated by my wish to fulfil the dearest, and the last duty in my power to the husband whom I have lost; and throwing myself on the candour of the few, and the indulgence of the many, I shall proceed to give you my observations on the character of Mr. Opie during an union with him of nine years.

If I have ever valued the little power of writing which it has been my amusement to cultivate, it is now that it enables me to pay a public tribute to him who first encouraged me to give my writings to the world, and if I have ever rejoiced that I obeyed his wishes on that subject, it is now that having already appeared as an author, I can offer myself to the notice of the public on this sacred and delicate occasion, with more propriety than if this were my first literary effort.

I have been advised to write a biographical account of Mr. Opie, but that is impossible, as there are circumstances in his life on which it would be improper and indelicate for me to expatiate, and biographical accounts must be complete, in order to be valuable;—besides, a more able pen than mine will, probably, perform the office which I have declined, and in the mean while your own elegant memoir is sufficient for the present, while the interesting tributes to Mr. Opie's memory and worth from the pen of Mrs. Inchbald,

Mr. Northcote, Mr. Shee and Mr. Boaden, leave me little to do but to fill up their powerful and faithful outlines.

It has been observed that distinguished men generally resemble their works, and this observation appears to me strikingly true if applied to Mr. Opie. He greatly resembled his paintings; and, while the trivial defects both of him and them were obvious to the many, the unusual excellencies of both could be completely known and justly valued only by the few.

Any observer however contemptible might in some of his pictures discover a neglect of proper costume in his draperies, a too strict adherence to the *models* from which he painted, and an inattention to the minuter parts of art, but it required the eye of a connoisseur, and the kindred feeling of an artist to distinguish and appretiate properly the simplicity of his designs, the justness of his representations, and the force of his light and shadow.—In like manner any one might observe in the artist himself a negligence in dress, a disregard of the common rules of common manners, and a carelessness to please those whom he considered as trifling and uninteresting, but it required a mind of powers nearly equal to his own, or gifted with a nice perception of uncommon endowments in others, to value, and to call forth his acuteness of observation and his depth of thinking; to follow him through the wide range of his perceptions, and to profit

by that just and philosophical mode of seeing and describing, on which his claims to mental superiority were so strongly built.

Those only whom he sufficiently respected to enter into argument with, or who were themselves fond of argument, are aware of the full extent of the powers of his mind :— with others, even when he loved them as friends, and valued them as companions, he indulged, for the most part, in conversation, which, though never trifling, was often unimportant, and which at least served the useful purpose of unbending a mind, only too frequently for the good of the frame which contained it, stretched to the very utmost limit. You have said of him that in argument he had the power of eliciting light from his opponent, and Mr. Northcote has exhibited his talent for conversing in another point of view by observing that “ it is difficult to say whether his conversation gave more amusement or instruction.”—Certain indeed it is, that his power to amuse was equal to his power to instruct ;—but, as flame shines brightest in certain airs, he shone the most in certain societies. The fire of his mind required certain applications to elicit its brilliancy, and those were love, esteem, and respect for the companions with whom he was conversing, and a perfect confidence that they desired and valued his society.

I was induced to mention this circumstance from

being fully aware that many persons, with whom Mr. Opie lived in apparent intimacy, had no suspicion of his possessing conversational talents of the highest order. But in general the *few only* possess a key to open in another the stores of mental excellence, especially when the entrance is also guarded by the proud consciousness of superiority, suspicious of being undervalued.

You, my dear Sir, were one of those who possessed a key, to unlock the mind of Mr. Opie, and to you were all its treasures known. You, therefore, are well aware that he excelled in aptness of quotation, that there was a peculiar playfulness of fancy in his descriptions; that he possessed the art of representing strongly the ridiculous in men and things, which he instantly and sensibly felt\*, and therefore the pictures drawn by his tongue

\* Since the above observations were written, I have received the following remarks from Mr. John Taylor, to whose pen I am indebted for the epitaph in the preceding pages, and I insert them here because as they were written by a gentleman who possesses great powers of discrimination and had a long and intimate acquaintance with Mr. Opie's character, they serve to corroborate very strongly the truth of what I myself have advanced.—A. O.

“No man was more willing to acknowledge contemporary merit, or more ready to render it just praise :—on more than one occasion when I had not an opportunity of attending Barry's Lecture at the Royal Academy, I desired him to give me an account of it for a particular purpose, and the following morning, I received a literal report, in which he gave a clear, forcible, and spirited detail of the discourse, and paid due homage to the merit of the pro-



lived as powerfully to the view as those from his pencil;—while his talent for repartee, for strong humour, and formidable though not malignant sarcasm, gave an ever varying attraction to his conversation; an attraction which no one I believe was ever more sensible of than yourself, as you were one of the friends whom he never failed to welcome with an artless warmth of manner which always found its way to the heart, because it bore indisputable marks of having come from it.

But as I am fully sensible that my testimony in favour of Mr. Opie's conversational superiority can add no

cessor.—He had a strong sense of humour, and discovered it where it was not obvious to common minds:—I recollect that he noticed with high admiration the attitude in which Bottom is placed in Sir Joshua's picture of Puck, considering it as an admirable stroke of humour to give Bottom a contemplative and philosophic aspect with an ass's head.—Multitudes have doubtless seen the picture without observing that striking proof of the genuine humour of the great artist. Indeed it is possible that many intelligent critics may have overlooked the figure, as it is so small in comparison with the main object, or may have considered it as merely an indication of the dramatic scene. He strongly felt the energies of the mind, and I have heard him read passages in Milton, and Dryden's Fables, in such a manner as to show how thoroughly he entered into the spirit and genius of their respective authors. He had a friendly and generous heart. His taste for music, as well as for literature and the arts, and the acquisitions which he had made, prove that if he had been born under happier auspices he might have become conspicuous in whatever he had attempted."

weight to that given by you and Mr. Northcote, and that both you and he may be supposed biassed by the partiality of friendship, I beg leave to offer, in corroboration of its truth, authority of a very high description, and which has hitherto not met the public eye,—that of Mr. Horne Tooke, whom even those who dislike his politics must admire as a man not only of sagacity the most acute, but of attainments the most extraordinary, and that of Sir James Mackintosh, on whose talents it is needless for me to expatiate.

Mr. Tooke, while Mr. Opie was painting him, had not only the opportunity, but the power of ‘sounding him, from his lowest note to the top of his compass.’—And he said, a short time afterwards, to one of his most distinguished friends, “Mr. Opie crowds more wisdom into a few words than almost any man I ever knew;—he speaks as it were in *axioms*, and what he observes is worthy to be remembered.”

Sir James Mackintosh, in a letter recently received from him, laments the loss of an acquaintance to whose society he looked forward as one of the pleasures which awaited him at his return to England, and adds the following observation:—“Had Mr. Opie turned his powers of mind to the study of philosophy, he would have been one of the first philosophers of the age.—I was never more struck than

with his original manner of thinking and expressing himself in conversation, and had he written on the subject, he would, perhaps, have thrown more light on the philosophy of his art than any man living."

Nor was Mr. Opie's intellectual superiority unappreciated by the eminent amongst my own sex.

Mrs. Inchbald has given to the world her opinion of my husband in her own interesting and energetic manner;—and Mrs. Siddons must pardon me, if I relate the following circumstance:—"Where is Mr. Opie?" said Mrs. Siddons, one evening at a party in B——k-street.—"He is gone," was the answer. "I am sorry for it," she replied, "for I meant to have sought him out, as when I am with him, I am always sure to hear him say something which I cannot forget, or at least which ought never to be forgotten."

I have been led to dwell on Mr. Opie's great talents for conversation, and to bring forward respectable evidence to prove it, in order to draw this inference; that to him who could in society, "*speak in axioms*," and express original ideas in an impressive and forcible manner, it could not be a very difficult task to conquer the only obstacle to his success as an author, namely, want of the habit of writing, and to become on the subject most dear and familiar to him, a powerful and eloquent writer.

That he was such, the following work, I trust, will sufficiently testify; and I should not have thought it necessary to draw the inference mentioned above, had it not been often asserted, and by many believed, that, however the ideas contained in the lectures might be conceived by Mr. Opie, it was not by his pen that those ideas were clothed in adequate language. But the slight texture of muslin could as easily assume the consistency of velvet, as the person supposed to have assisted Mr. Opie in the composition of his Lectures, have given language to the conceptions of his mind. He who alone conceived them was alone capable of giving them adequate expression; nor could so weak and ill-founded a suspicion have ever entered into the head of any one, but for the false ideas which, as you well know, are entertained of painting and of painters in general.

There are many who set literature so much above the arts, that they would think Mr. Opie showed more ability in being able to write on painting, than in executing the finest of his pictures.

Such persons see a simple effect produced, and are wholly unconscious what compound powers are requisite to produce it.—They would gaze on a portrait painted by the first masters, they would see the character, the expression, and the sort of historical effect which the picture exhibited; but they would turn away and still consider the

artist as a mere painter, and not at all suspect that he could think, or argue, or write. Here let me declare in the most solemn and unequivocal manner, that to my certain knowledge, Mr. Opie never received from any human being the slightest assistance whatever in the composition of his lectures; I believe I read to myself some parts of them as they were given at the Royal Institution before they were delivered, and afterwards I had the honour of reading them to the bishop of Durham, who said when I had concluded: "you were known before as a great painter, Mr. Opie, you will now be known as a great writer also:"—but the four finished lectures on which he employed all the powers of his mind, and which he delivered as professor of painting at the Royal Academy, I never even saw, but he read each of them to me when finished, and two of them I believe to Mr. Landseer, the engraver, and Mr. Phillips, the academician. Assistance from any one Mr. Opie would have despised, even if he had needed it; as none but the most contemptible of human beings can endure to strut forth in borrowed plumes, and claim a reputation which they have not conscientiously deserved. Such meanness was unworthy a man like Mr. Opie, and the lectures themselves are perhaps a fatal proof not only of his eagerness to obtain reputation, as a lecturer, but also of the laborious industry by which he endeavoured to satisfy that eagerness.

To the toils of the artist during the day; (and he never was idle for a moment,) succeeded those of the writer every evening; and from the month of September 1806, to February 1807, he allowed his mind no rest, and scarcely indulged himself in the relaxation of a walk, or the society of his friends. To the completion therefore of the lectures in question his life perhaps fell an untimely sacrifice; and in the bitterness of regret, I wish they had never been even thought of. But they were written, were delivered, and highly were they admired. They serve to form another wreath for his brow. Let it then be suffered to bloom there, nor let the hand of ignorance, inadvertence, envy, or malignity, attempt to pluck it thence!

Mr. Northcote, in his character of Mr. Opie, has mentioned his filial piety, and I can confirm what he has asserted by the testimony of my own experience: indeed all who knew him, would readily admit, that the strength of his affections equalled that of his intellect. I have heard Mr. Opie say that, when he first came to London, he was considered as a sort of *painting Chatterton*. But it was not in talent only that he resembled the unfortunate Chatterton. He resembled him also in attachment to his family.

Chatterton, if we may judge by his letters, never looked forward to any worldly good without telling his mother

and sister that he hoped to share it with them; and no sooner was Mr. Opie settled in London, with a prospect of increasing employment, than some of his first earnings were transmitted by him to his mother; and his sister whom he tenderly loved, and who well deserved his affection, was invited to the metropolis, to enjoy the popularity, and partake of the prosperity of her brother. Here, unhappily for Chatterton, the resemblance between them ceases, for he possessed not the industry, the patience, the prudence and the self-denial of Mr. Opie. The mother and sister whom Chatterton held so dear were left by his wretched and selfish suicide in the same state of poverty which they had ever known; while those of my husband were enabled by his well-deserved success to know the comforts of a respectable competence. Mr. Opie's father died, I believe, at a very early period of his son's life; but he lived to witness the dawnings of his genius, and to feel his affections, as well as his pride gratified by seeing that genius first exhibited in a likeness of *himself*.—Perhaps the following anecdote may not be unacceptable to my readers; but I cannot expect them to experience from it the same interest which it produced in me, especially as I cannot narrate it in the simple yet impressive and dramatic manner in which my poor sister used to tell it, while, in order to beguile her grief for her brother's

loss, she dwelt with never satisfied pride and delight on his talents, and his worth.

One Sunday afternoon, while his mother was at church, Mr. Opie, then a boy of ten or eleven years old, fixed his materials for painting in a little kitchen, directly opposite the parlour, where his father sat reading the bible. He went on drawing till he had finished every thing but the head, and when he came to that, he frequently ran into the parlour to look up in his father's face. He repeated this extraordinary interruption so often, that the old man became quite angry, and threatened to correct him severely if he did the like again. This was exactly what the young artist wanted. He wished to paint his father's eyes when lighted up, and sparkling with indignation, and having obtained his end, he quietly resumed his task. He had completed his picture before his mother's return from church, and on her entering the house he set it before her. She knew it instantly, but, ever true to her principles, she was very angry with him for having painted on a Sunday, thereby profaning the Sabbath-day. The child however was so elated by his success, that he disregarded her remonstrance, and hanging fondly round her neck, he was alive only to the pleasure she had given him by owning the strength of the resemblance. At this moment his father entered the room, and recognizing



His own portrait immediately, highly, approved his son's amusement during the afternoon, (parental pride conquering habitual piety awhile,) and exhibited the picture with ever new satisfaction to all who came to the house, while the story of his anger at interruptions so happily excused and accounted for, added interest to his narrative, and gratified still more the pride of the artist.

Mr. Opie used to speak of his mother with the most touching enthusiasm. He described her as the most perfect of human beings ;—as the most mild, most just, and most disinterested of women ;—and I believe that scarcely any one who knew her would have thought this description an exaggerated one. He loved to relate little instances of the sacred love of justice which led her regardless of the partialities of a parent to decide even against her own children, when as criminals they appeared before her, and were in the slightest degree culpable ;—and these stories always ended in recollections of her tender care of him during his feeble childhood, of the gloves and great coat warmed at the winter's fire against he went to school ; and while he related them with a glistening eye, and a feeling of grateful affection, I never found the story, though often told, a tedious one, and used to feel the tie that bound me to him strengthened by the narration. This parent so tenderly beloved, was spared the misery of surviving her son,

and breathed her last in perfect possession of her faculties and in all the cheering hopes of the pious, in May 1805, at the advanced age of ninety-two.

Mr. Northcote has also mentioned Mr. Opie's READINESS TO FORGIVE INJURIES, and I could bring many instances to confirm this observation. Such indeed was his extreme placability, that it was sometimes with difficulty he could prevent himself from showing he had forgiven an offense, even before the offender could exhibit tokens of contrition ; and his anger had always subsided long ere that self-respect which every one ought to preserve allowed him to prove by his conduct that it had done so. A kind word, and an affectionate shake by the hand, had always such power to banish from his mind the remembrance of a wrong committed against him, that I have seen him by such means so totally deprived even of salutary caution, as to be willing to confide again, where he knew his confidence had been unworthily betrayed. Such a power of forgiving and forgetting injuries as this, is, I fear, a rare virtue, though forcibly enjoined by our Saviour's precepts and example : but Mr. Opie's entire FREEDOM FROM VANITY of any kind is a still rarer quality. He was so slow to commend, and panegyric on the works of contemporary artists was so sparingly given by him, that it was natural for some persons to suppose him actuated by the feelings of professional jealousy ; but it is more generous,

and I am fully convinced more *just*, to think this sluggishness to praise was merely the result of such a *high* idea of excellence in his art, as made him not easily satisfied with efforts to obtain it; and surely he who was never led by vanity or conceit, to be contented with his *own* works, could not be expected to show great indulgence to the works of others.

During the nine years that I was his wife, I never saw him satisfied with any one of his productions, and often, very often have I seen him enter my sitting-room, and throwing himself in an agony of despondence on the sofa, exclaim, "I am the most stupid of created beings, and I never, never shall be a painter as long as I live."

But while he was thus painfully alive to his own deficiencies, and to those of others, he was equally sensible of the excellencies of his rivals; and it was from him, and his nice and candid discrimination of their respective merits, that I learnt to appretiate the value of an exhibition. He used to study at Somerset House, when the pictures were hung up, with more persevering attention and thirst for improvement than was ever exhibited perhaps by the lowest student in the schools; and, on his return, I never heard him expatiate on his own excellencies, but sorrowfully dwell on his own defects, while he often expressed to me his envy of certain powers in art which other painters were masters of, and which he feared he should

never be able to obtain. Sometimes, he used to relate to me the flattering observations made to him on his own pictures; but as it was to ME ONLY, and in the most simple and careless manner possible, I felt convinced that he did so more to gratify me, than himself.

To prove how completely he was above that littleness of mind which leads some men to be jealous even of being supposed under an obligation to those they hold most dear, I shall venture to relate the following circumstance, at the risk of exposing myself to the imputation of vanity, while endeavouring to prove how much that weakness was unknown to Mr. Opie. When Mr. Opie became again a husband, he found it necessary, in order to procure indulgencies for a wife whom he loved, to make himself popular as a portrait painter, and in that productive and difficult branch of the art, female portraiture. He therefore turned his attention to those points, which he had before been long in the habit of neglecting; and he laboured earnestly to correct certain faults in his portraits, which he had been sometimes too negligent to amend. Hence, his pictures in general soon acquired a degree of grace and softness, to which they had of late years been strangers. In consequence of this, an academician, highly respectable as a man and admirable as an artist, came up to him at the second Exhibition after we married, and complimented him on one of his female portraits, saying: "We

never saw any thing like this in you before, Opie,—this must be owing to your wife." On his return, he repeated this conversation to me; and added in the kindest manner, that if his brother artists would but allow that he *did* improve, he was very willing that they *should attribute the improvement to his wife*.

Once, and once only, did I see his firm and manly mind at all overset by public applause ; and that was on the night when he first lectured at the Academy. His countenance, when I met him on his return, told me of his success before I heard it from his companions, sir F. Bourgeois and sir W. Beechey, who accompanied him home, and who seemed to enjoy the triumph which they described. The next morning he told me that he had passed a very restless night : "for, indeed," said he, "I was so *elated*, that I could not sleep."

It was this freedom from vanity that led him to love and to seek the society of the literary and the learned. As he was no egotist, had no petty wish to be the first man in company, and sought society not in order to shine in it, but to be instructed and amused, he feared not to encounter "the proud man's contumely," if that proud man were really capable of affording him amusement and instruction. He had not received a classical education himself, and he was therefore desirous of profiting by the remarks of those who possessed that advantage ; he knew he had not read much, he was therefore

honourably ambitious to associate with men who had read more : but such were the powers of his memory, that he remembered all he had read ; and Milton, Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, Gray, Cowper, Hudibras, Burke, and Dr. Johnson, he might, to use a familiar expression, be said to know by heart. He knew that he had no pretensions to what is called learning,—though he perfectly understood the French language, and was not wholly ignorant either of Italian or of Latin ;—but his self-love never shrank from association with learned men. The epithet of pedant, applied to a scholar, had no power to frighten him from the society of scholars ; for he always sought to see men and things as they *were*, not as they were *said* to be : besides, his observation had told him that, true as the shadow to the form, some lessening epithet always attaches itself to the highly gifted of both sexes, whether justly or unjustly, and that the possessors of talents are always called eccentric, conceited, or satirical, while the possessors of learning are prejudged to be arrogant, pedantic, and overbearing.

But, where such an imputation was well founded, it was of no importance to Mr. Opie ; he was conscious that he aimed at no competition with the learned ; while with a manly simplicity, which neither feared contempt nor courted applause, he has often, even in such company, made observations, originating in the native treasures of his own mind, which learning could not teach, and which

learning alone could not enable its possessor to appreciate. But, while he sought and valued the society of a Dr. Parr, he shrunk with mingled taste and pride from that of the half-learned,—men whom he denominated *word-catchers*,—men, more eager and more able to detect a fault in grammar, than to admire the original thoughts which such defective language expressed. He felt that amongst persons of that description he could neither be understood nor valued, and therefore he was at once too proud and too humble to endeavour to please them: while he must also have been conscious that, where he was likely to be judged with candour, and genius was valued before learning, he made all prejudice against his want of birth, of a classical education, and of the graces of manner, vanish before the powers of his intellect and the impressive force of his observations. But there was also *another* class of men with whom he was unwilling to converse. It has been observed of some one, that he was such an enemy to prejudice, that he might be said to be prejudiced against prejudice: and Mr. Opie was so certain that to some descriptions of clever men he could never be an object of interest, from his want of external polish and classical attainments, that I have often undergone the mortification of observing him remain silent, while flippancy was loquacious; and of seeing the tinsel of well-fashioned, but superficial fluency, obtain that notice which was more

justly due to the sterling, though in the opinion of some, perhaps, the rugged ore of his conversation. But certain it is, that the republic of letters and of arts has an aristocratic bias ; and many of its members are of such sybarite habits, such fastidious delicacy, and have such a decided preference for the rich, the polished, and the high-born members of its body, that a man of plain, simple, and unobtrusive manners, depending only on his character and his genius for respect, is not likely to be much the object of their notice.

I do not know whether the following anecdote be a proof of the presence of pride in Mr. Opie, or of the absence of vanity,—but I shall relate it without further comment:—We were one evening in a company consisting chiefly of men who possessed rare mental endowments, and considerable reputation, but who were led by high animal spirits and a consciousness of power to animadvert on their absent acquaintance, whether intellectual or otherwise, with an unsparing and ingenious severity which I have rarely seen equalled, and even the learned, the witty, and the agreeable were set up like so many nine pins only to be bowled down again immediately. As we kept early hours, I knew that we should probably be the first to go away;—and I sat in dread of the arrival of twelve o'clock. At length it came, and I received the usual sign from Mr. Opie ; but to go, and leave ourselves at the mercy of those who remained, was a trial that I shrank from ; and in a



whisper I communicated my fears to my husband, and my wish to remain longer in consequence of them. An angry look, and a desire expressed aloud that I should get ready to go, was all the answer that I received; and I obeyed him.—When we were in the street, he said: “I never in my life acted from a motive so unworthy as that of fear; and this was a fear so contemptible, that I should have scorned to have acted upon it;—and I am really ashamed of you.” No wonder—I was ashamed of myself.

That a feeling so unworthy as a fear of this nature had no power to influence Mr. Opie, I can bring another instance to prove. Some years ago, a gentleman called on Mr. Opie, from motives of friendship, to inform him that a person, whose name I shall not mention, the editor of some magazine now no more remembered, was going to publish in his next number a very severe abusive memoir of him, and hinted that it might be adviseable for Mr. Opie to take measures to prevent the publication, showing him at the same time a number already published, which contained a similar memoir of an eminent and highly respected actor,—and was an alarming proof, as the gentleman thought, of the writer’s powers. Mr. Opie perused the memoir; and, returning it to his friend, coolly observed, that if that was all the person could do, he was very welcome to say any thing of him that he chose; but that he never had condescended, nor ever would condescend under any circumstances whatever, to put a stop, by bribe or

menace, to any thing of the kind.—For the exact words which he used on this occasion, I will not answer ; but I am sure that such was the sentiment which he expressed ; and I shall here take the liberty of observing, that while he scorned, by bribe or menace, to avert printed calumny against him, he also scorned to obtain, by bribe of any kind, a printed eulogium. For his fame, *latterly* at least, he was indebted to *himself* alone :—by no puffs, no paragraphs, did he endeavour to obtain public notice ; and I have heard him with virtuous pride declare, that, whether his reputation were great or small, it was self-derived, and he was indebted for it to no exertions but those of his own industry and talents.

Mr. Opie was as free from prejudice on every point, as he was from vanity ;—I mean that he never espoused an opinion without well weighing both sides of the question, and was not led by his personal preferences or hatreds to prejudge any man, any measures, or any works. For instance :—When Mr. Burke's splendid work on the French Revolution was published, he read it with delight, and imbibed most of the political opinions of its author : but as soon as he heard that a powerful writer had appeared on the other side of the question, he was eager to read what might be said in opposition to Mr. Burke,—truth being his only object on all occasions. I think no stronger instance than this can be given of the love of fair inquiry

which was a leading feature in Mr. Opie's mind ; because, when that celebrated book appeared, it became a sort of religion, and those who professed its doctrines thought there was no political salvation for those who did not. And Mr. Opie had caught the enthusiasm, had imbibed the convictions which that eloquent work inspired ;—still he would not condemn the author of the Rights of Man unread, but felt the propriety and the justice of judging with his own eyes and understanding before he passed a definitive sentence. Strange is it, to the eye of reason, that conduct like this, apparently so natural and so easy, should make part of a man's panegyric, as if it were an act of uncommon virtue ; yet those who have at all accustomed themselves to study the habits and motives of mankind in general, will own that the above-mentioned conduct was of the *rarest kind* ; and that there are so many who are too indolent, or too prejudiced, to read, or to inquire on certain subjects and concerning certain people, that they attribute to writers and to sects, both in politics and religion, opinions and designs which it never entered into their heads to conceive of ; and, taught by prejudice and aversion, believe that on some points ignorance is graceful, and inveteracy becoming. Different was the opinion, and different the practice, of Mr. Opie. He seemed to consider a prejudice and an enemy as the same thing, and to think it as desirable to get rid of the one as

to subdue the other.—But though all Mr. Opie's opinions might not be just opinions, whatever they were, they were the result of toil and investigation. *He* might, like others, occasionally mistake weeds for flowers; and bring them home, and carefully preserve them as such: but the weeds were gathered by his own hands, and he had at least by his labour deserved that they should be valuable acquisitions.

On no subject did Mr. Opie evince more generosity, and liberality of mind, than in his opinions respecting women of talents, especially those who had dared to cultivate the powers which their Maker had bestowed on them, and to become candidates for the pleasures, the pangs, the rewards, and the penalties of authorship. This class of women never had a more zealous defender than my husband against the attacks of those less liberal, than himself. He did not lay it down as a positive axiom,—that a female writer must fail in every duty that is most graceful and becoming in woman, and be an offensive companion, a negligent wife, and an inattentive mother.—Idleness, in both sexes, was the fault that he was most violent against; and there was no employment, consistent with delicacy and modesty, that he wished a woman to be debarred from, after she had fulfilled the regular and necessary duties of her sex and her situation: nor, if authorship did not lead a woman to disregard and undervalue the

accomplishments and manners of her own sex, or to be forward and obtrusive in company, did he think it just and candid to affix to such a woman the degrading epithets of unfeminine, or masculine.

When our marriage took place, he knew that my most favourite amusement was writing; and he always encouraged, instead of checking, my ambition to become an acknowledged author. Our only quarrel on the subject was, not that I wrote so much, but that I did not write *more and better*: and to the last hour of my existence I shall deplore those habits of indolence which made me neglect to write, while it was in my power to profit by his criticisms and advice; and when, by employing myself more regularly in that manner, I should have been sure to receive the proudest and dearest reward of woman,—the approbation of a husband at once the object of her respect and of her love.

But had Mr. Opie been inclined to that mean and jealous egotism which leads some men to dislike even good sense in our sex, an aversion originating probably in their being *self-judged*, and desirous of shrinking from a competition in which they know that they could not be victorious, still, it was impossible for *him* to find a rival amongst women;—for, if ever there was an understanding which deserved in all respects the proud and just

distinction of a MASCULINE understanding, it was that of Mr. Opie. In many men, though of high talents and excelling genius, there are to be seen *womanish* weaknesses, as they are called, and littlehesses, the result of vanity and egotism, that debase and obscure the manliness of their intellect. But the intellect of Mr. Opie had such a masculine vigour about it, that it never yielded for a moment to the pressure of a weakness; but kept on with such a firm, untired, undeviating step towards the goal of excellence, that it was impossible for the delicate feet of woman to overtake it in its career.

Of Mr. Opie's industry and incessant application I shall now beg leave to speak.—

In one respect he had, perhaps, an advantage over most of his competitors. "Many artists," as Mr. Northcote judiciously observes, "may be said to paint to live;—but *he* lived to paint." To many, painting may be a pleasure, and is a profession; but in him it was a *passion*, and he was never happy long unless he was employed in the gratification of it. Whenever he came to Norwich while I was on a visit to my father, I had no chance of detaining him there unless he found business awaiting him. But no society, and no situation, however honourable and however pleasant, could long keep him from his painting-room. In the autumn of 1806 we were staying at Southill, the seat of

Mr. Whitbread; and never did I see him so happy, when absent from London, as he was there; for he felt towards his host and hostess every sentiment of respect and admiration which it is pleasant to feel, and honourable to inspire. But though he was the object of the kindest and most flattering attention, he sighed to return to London and his pursuits:—and when we had been at Southill only eight days, he said to me, on my expressing my unwillingness to go away, “Though I shall be even anxious to come hither again, recollect that I have been idle *eight days*.”

But his art was not only his passion, it was also his pride; and whatever had a tendency to exalt painting and its professors in the eyes of the world, was a source of gratification to him. He used often to expatiate on the great classical attainments of Mr. Fuseli, whose wit he admired, and whose conversation he delighted in: but I have often thought that one cause of the pleasure which he derived from mentioning that gentleman's attainments was, his conviction that the learning of Mr. Fuseli was an honour to his profession, and tended to exalt it in the opinion of society. I saw the same sort of exultation in him, when Mr. Hoppner and Mr. Shee became candidates for literary reputation:—he loved to see the tie between poetry and painting drawn closer and closer (a tie which he felt to exist, though it was not generally allowed); and

I well remember that, while he read the well-told tales of the one, and the excellent poem of the other, he seemed to feel a pride in them as the works of *painters*, and to rejoice that their authors united, in their own persons, the sister and corresponding arts.

But to return to Mr. Opie's industry.—

It was not only from inclination, but from principle, that he was industrious: he thought it vicious for any one to be satisfied in art with aught less than excellence, and knew that excellence is not to be obtained by convulsive starts of application, but by continued and daily perseverance\*; not by the alternately rapid and faint step of the hare, but by the slow yet sure and incessant pace of the tortoise. He required not the incitement of a

\* As a striking indication of that perseverance which so particularly characterized Mr. Opie in his maturer years, I shall relate the following anecdote:—When he was about eight years old, a sum in arithmetic was set him by his eldest brother, a friend, and a neighbour. They made a bet that he would not be able to do it. Indeed, the sum was so difficult an one, that he had laboured at it some days without being able to accomplish the task; and at last, after keeping his sister up till past twelve o'clock at night, she persuaded him to give up the point, and not puzzle himself any more about it. Accordingly, vexed and dejected, he went to bed; and, as his sister thought, to sleep: but two hours after, he knocked at her door, requesting she would get up and give him a lighted candle; calling out, "Sister, sister, I can do it!" She immediately rose and gave him the candle; and before she had dressed herself



yearly and public competition for fame to make him studious and laborious. He would have toiled as much had there been no Exhibition,—and not only during the few months or weeks preceding it did he prepare for that interesting and anxious period, but the whole foregoing year was his term of preparation.

It was his opinion, that no one should either paint or write with a view merely to present bread or present reputation, nor be contented to shine, like a beauty or a fashion, the idol only of the passing hour;—he felt it right for painters and authors to experience the honourable ambition and stimulating desire to live

“ In song of distant days : ”

his time, therefore, his labour, and his study, were the coin with which he proudly tried to purchase immortality: nor did he ever waste the precious hours

and gone down stairs, he had done the sum, and jumped about the room with joy at his success. His mother, I find, would not allow him to sit up so late as he wished, fearing (as she often said) his brains would be turned with so much learning; therefore she would not supply him with candles. The consequence was, that he purchased candles with his own pocket-money, and used to get up to write and read after his parents were in bed. In summer he always rose as soon as dawn appeared. Nay, such was his fondness for writing, that, when a very little boy indeed, he used to spend in writing-paper the penny his uncle gave him on a market-day.

of day-light in any pursuits or engagements which had not some connection with his art or his professional interests. No wonder, then, that every successive year saw him improved in some branch of his profession:—no wonder that one of our first painters should have said of him, “Others get forward by steps, but that man by *strides*.”

He was always in his painting-room by half past eight in winter, and by eight o'clock in summer; and there he generally remained, closely engaged in painting, till half past four in winter, and till five in summer. Nor did he ever allow himself to be idle even when he had no pictures bespoken: and as he never let his execution rust for want of practice, he, in that case, either sketched out designs for historical or fancy pictures, or endeavoured, by working on an unfinished picture of *me*, to improve himself by incessant practice in that difficult branch of his art, female portraiture. Neither did he suffer his exertions to be paralysed by neglect the most unexpected, and disappointment the most undeserved\*. Though he had had a picture in the Exhibition of 1801, which was universally admired, and

\* Mr. Hoare has alluded to this period (in page 13 of *The Artist*) in the following words: “The effects produced by hours of despondence, on a mind so strongly gifted, who can measure? His intellectual strength, however, prevailed,” &c.

purchased as soon as it was beheld, he saw himself at the end of that year, and the beginning of the next, almost wholly without employment; and even my sanguine temper yielding to the trial, I began to fear that, small as our expenditure was, it must become still smaller. Not that I allowed myself to own that I desponded; on the contrary, I was forced to talk to him of hopes, and to bid him look forward to brighter prospects, as his temper, naturally desponding, required all the support possible. But gloomy and painful indeed were those three alarming months; and I consider them as the severest trial that I experienced during my married life. However, as I before observed, even despondence did not make him indolent; he continued to paint regularly as usual, and no doubt by that means increased his ability to do justice to the torrent of business which soon after set in towards him, and never ceased to flow till the day of his death.

It is probable that many young artists, men whose habits and whose style are yet to form, will eagerly seek out opportunities to study the pictures of Mr. Opie, and endeavour to make his excellencies their own; but let them not overlook the legacy, the more valuable legacy which he has bequeathed to students, and even to proficients in art, in the powerful example of his life. Such,

it appears, was his application, that it would have ensured ability and renown, even had his powers been of a less superior kind ; and such were his œconomy and self-denial, that they would have secured independence even where the means of obtaining it were slender and uncertain. For the gratifications of vanity, and for the pomps of life, Mr. Opie had no inclination ; therefore he could not be said to have merit in not trying to indulge in them. But though his tastes were simple, and he loved what may be denominated the cheap pleasures of existence, reading, conversation, an evening walk, either for the sake of exercise or for the study of picturesque effect,—still, there were pleasures of a more expensive sort, for which he earnestly longed, but in which his well-principled œconomy forbade him to indulge ;—I mean the purchase of pictures and of books. But till he had acquired *a certain sum*, always the object of his industry,—a sum that would, he trusted, make him independent of the world,—he was resolved to deny himself every indulgence that was not absolutely necessary ; for he shrunk with horror from the idea of incurring debts or pecuniary obligation : and as he never squandered any thing on unnecessary wants, he was always able to discharge every debt as it was incurred, whether of the day or of the week, and to meet the exigencies of the moment, not only for himself, but sometimes

for others less provident, less self-denying, and less fortunate than he was.

He was temperate in most of his habits. Dinner parties, if they consisted of persons whose society he valued, he was always willing to join. Still, his habits and his taste were so domestic in their nature, that he, on the whole, preferred passing his evenings at home, to joining any society abroad ; and he employed his hours from tea- to bedtime either in reading books of instruction or amusement, in studying prints from the best ancient and modern masters, or in sketching designs for pictures of various descriptions. Not unfrequently did he allow himself the relaxation of reading a novel, even if it were not of the first class ; for he was above the petty yet common affectation of considering that sort of reading as beneath any persons but fools and women. And if his fondness for works of that kind was a weakness, it was one which he had in common with Mr. Fox and Mr. Porson. But it was with great difficulty I could prevail on him to accompany me either to public places, or into private parties of a mixed and numerous kind ; yet when at the theatre he was interested and amused, and still more so at the opera, as he delighted in Italian music and Italian singing ; and such was the quickness of his ear, and so excellent was his musical memory, that in common he accurately remem-

bered a tune that pleased him, on only once hearing it.— He played the flute pleasingly: and though he had not the smallest pretension to voice, he sung comic songs to me occasionally; and repeated comic verses with such humorous and apt expression, that I have often told him, I was convinced, had a troop of comedians visited his native place before he conceived his decided predilection for painting, that he would have been an actor instead of a painter; and probably would in time have been, in some kinds of comedy, at the head of his profession. He had also no inconsiderable power of mimicry: but as in the rainbow all the colours of the prism are assembled at once, though the brightest and deepest only are distinctly visible; so, where there is one distinguished and superior talent, the person thus gifted unites and possesses usually all the rest, though in an inferior degree.

But to go back to his œconomy and self-denial.— They were often such as to make me rashly imagine them to be wholly unnecessary; still, I respected so highly his motives for the privations to which he subjected both me and himself, that for the most part I submitted to them cheerfully, looking forward with a hope (which was not disappointed) that the time would come when our circumstances would allow us to have more of the comforts and elegancies of life, and to receive

our friends in a manner more suited to the esteem which we entertained for them. The time *did* come;—but, unfortunately, it came *too late*. Mr. Opie was conscious that he had nearly realized the sum so long desired. I was allowed to make the long-projected alterations and improvements in my own apartments, and he had resolved to indulge himself, as he called it, in the luxury of keeping a horse. You may remember, my dear Sir, that when he had given over lecturing for the season, and you were requesting him to write a paper for *The Artist* against a given time, he replied that he was tired of writing, that he would be a gentleman during the spring months, keep a horse, and ride out every evening. The *next* time you saw him, he was on a sick couch, and the object of affectionate solicitude to all who surrounded him ! He lived not to enjoy the independence which he had so virtuously toiled to obtain; but was cut off in the prime of every possession and expectation, and in that year both of his married life and mine, which I can with truth aver was the most prosperous and the most happy !

It may not be uninteresting to my readers to know what were the last pictures on which Mr. Opie's genius was employed. I shall therefore mention some of the most interesting amongst them; and which proved incontestably,

if proofs were at all wanting, that he was capable of excelling in every branch of his art: One of them was a very graceful portrait of Mrs. Coxe, wife of Mr. R. Albion Coxe;—another was Mrs. R. Heathcote in the character of Miranda, and exhibited a faithful copy of the beauty which it professed to represent;—a third was a head taken from the Miranda, but differing from it both in features and in drapery;—and the fourth was the portrait of the Duke of Gloucester, “one of the happiest instances of his labours in perfect harmony of tone,” as you have asserted in *The Artist* from very high authority, namely, that of Mr. West; and while the face was allowed to be an exact representation of that of His Royal Highness, prejudice itself alone could have denied that the air and carriage of the figure resembled the graceful and dignified original.

But the picture (a kitcat, I believe,) taken from the Miranda was literally the *last* which Mr. Opie finished;—and it is perhaps the most spirited as well as the most beautiful female head that he ever painted. This picture was originally bespoke by Mr. Lyster Parker, who is, you know, a liberal patron of artists of the present day; but he gave it up to his relation Sir John Leycester, on his expressing his admiration of it, and his wish to possess it: and as it *was* the *last* picture which he lived to complete, I



should regret that it was the property of any one but myself, did I not know that Mr. Opie rejoiced in its destination; and were I not assured of its being placed in that *rarest* of situations, a gallery consisting chiefly of *modern art*, doing honour to the genius who painted and to the amateur who admired it.

Mrs. Inchbald has said, and with her usual truth of observation, that Mr. Opie's "habitual ruggedness of address was stigmatized by the courtly observer with the appellation of ill-breeding." Nor can any one wonder that it was so; for courtly are only too often superficial observers; and because the manner was rugged, they were very likely to suppose that the matter was so too. But surely, on the words uttered, and not on the manner of utterance, depends the truth of the question whether the speaker be ill-bred, or otherwise: for I have often heard persons with the gentlest voice, and softest address possible, make rude and cruel observations, which wounded sensibility to the soul. But, except when Mr. Opie felt, as Mr. Northcote observes, an honest indignation against what he conceived to be error, especially in those whom he loved and respected, he was never guilty of attacks on the feelings and self-love of others,—that *worst* and *most obnoxious* part of ill-breeding.

When he first came to London,—to use Dr. Wolcot's expression,

“ The Cornish boy, in tin-mines bred,  
Whose genius like his native diamonds shone,”—

it was reported that he used to speak unpleasant truths, which the humour that they were delivered with could scarcely render palatable. But I have reason to think that these his recorded sayings were invented, and related by a friend who wished to make him an object of public attention, and fancied that, the more of a savage he was represented to be, the greater wonder he would appear as a painter;—for, when I have repeated to him the speeches he was said to have made, he has solemnly assured me that he never uttered them; and that he was convinced they were invented for him, to answer the purpose above mentioned.

Mr. Opie had, I maintain it, too much *good taste* to speak truth unnecessarily and offensively: and when he could not avoid in society giving an opinion contrary to the wishes of the person requiring it, he always regretted the necessity. In proof of this, let me observe that I have often heard him admire and envy Sir Joshua Reynolds's happy manner of evading a direct answer, when applied to to give an opinion of the drawings or paintings of young ladies, or tyros in art. Sir Joshua he used to say, had

a method of laughing a he! he! he! *so equivocally toned*, that the parties interested in understanding it favourably might do so without any great strength of self-flattery. Now it must be granted, that a man who scrupled not to say all that he thought, however offensive and disagreeable, would not have envied the laugh of *Sir Joshua*. Another proof of this is, that Mr. Opie never would believe, or allow, that Dr. Johnson, whom he had twice the happiness of painting, ever uttered the harsh things attributed to him; or, if the testimony was so strong that he was forced to admit it, he used to maintain it, that the provocation must have been *just* and irresistible; for he idolized Dr. Johnson in every point of view: and therefore the reason why he could not bear to attribute to him this offensive habit of speaking, must have been his considering it as a terrible defect. Sometimes the love of repartee, and *no one* had greater talents for it, might lead him to say a severe provided it was a witty thing, and sometimes a sarcastic one, if it had any pretensions to humour; as in the following instances:—When he was one of the hangers at the Academy, in the year 1799, his companion in that office endeavoured, but in vain, to make him admire the pictures of a certain young artist. At last, wearied out with the fruitless task, he exclaimed, “Why now, Opie, look at that hand! *You* never painted such a hand as that in your life.” “No,” replied Mr. Opie archly; “but *you* have—

*many* such." The good-humoured artist to whom he spoke (a gentleman high in his profession) enjoyed the joke, though at his own expense: and I beg leave to add, that the painter who was the subject of it has now deservedly a considerable reputation.—The other instance is as follows:—As we were coming from your apartments one evening, and were passing St. Giles's church, in company with a gentleman of avowedly *sceptical opinions*, Mr. Opie said, "I was *married* at that church," (alluding to his first marriage, dissolved by act of parliament.) "And *I*," replied our companion, "was *christened* there." "Indeed!" answered Mr. Opie: "It seems they do not do their work well at that church then, for it does not *hold*." But to return to my subject.—

Though Mr. Opie had never learnt those habitual restraints which are the result of early good breeding, and are naturally imposed on us by the accidental circumstance of our being born in a certain situation of life\*, he had a well-principled contempt and aversion, in which I most

\* From the circumstance of his humble birth, however disadvantageous it might have been to him in some respects, Mr. Opie derived one of his claims to *respect* and *esteem*, by exhibiting on all occasions the *true* and *virtuous* pride of never shrinking from the mention and acknowledgement of his former situation, and never aiming to make his parentage and connections appear higher than they really were. Even *I* never knew till I read it in *The Artist*, that his mother was descended from an ancient family. So far was he from wishing to derive his consequence from aught *extrinsic*, aught *less dignified* than his own *conscious ability*.—A. O.

cordially sympathize, for those who are by some denominated *natural characters*, persons who value themselves on *speaking their minds*; and who, despising the graceful bondage which politeness, or in other words *benevolence*, imposes on us, animadvert in cold blood on our personal or other defects, or on the defects of our nearest relations and dearest friends. Mr. Opie considered those violent attacks on the feelings and self-love of others, which persons often make because their honesty, forsooth, forbids them to be silent, as offensive habits, and thought that they should be guarded against with the strictest watchfulness. For, whatever such persons may think, it is temper, not honesty, that guides them on such occasions; and to them it might be useful to study the precept contained in the following lines:—

“ Large bounties to bestow we wish in vain;  
But all can shun the *guilt of giving pain*\*.”

Had Mr. Opie been constantly in the habit of coarsely speaking his mind, what a scene of discord might his painting-room occasionally have become!—for, if a portrait-painter should pique himself on being a *natural character*, terrible sometimes might be the consequences of a sitting; as, of all employments, portrait-painting is,

\* Poem on Sensibility, by Mrs. H. More.

perhaps, the most painful and trying to a man of pride and sensibility, and the most irritating to an irritable man: To hear beauties and merits in a portrait often stigmatized as deformities and blemishes;—to have high lights taken for white spots, and dark effective shadows for the dirty appearance of a snuff-taker;—to witness discontent in the standers-by because the painting does not exhibit the sweet smile of the sitter, though it is certain that a smile on canvass looks like the grin of idiocy; while a laughing eye, if the artist attempts to copy it, as unavoidably assumes the disgusting resemblance of progressive intoxication. Sitters themselves Mr. Opie rarely found troublesome, except when they were not punctual, or when they exhibited impatience to be gone, and the restlessness consequent on that feeling:—but not so, sometimes, were their companions and friends. *Persons of worship*, as Mr. Opie used to call them, that is, persons of great consequence, either from talent, rank, or widely spreading connections, are sometimes attended by others, whose aim is to endeavour to please the great man or woman by flattery, wholly at the expense of the poor artist; and to minister sweet food to the palate of the patron, regardless though it be wormwood to that of the painter. Hence arise an eulogy on the beauties and perfections of the person painted, and regrets that they are so inadequately rendered by the person painting;

while frivolous objection succeeds to frivolous objection, and impossibilities are expected and required as if they were possibilities. I have known, indeed, several honourable exceptions to this general rule ; but I have only too frequently witnessed its truth, and *my* temper and patience have often been on the point of deserting me, even when Mr. Opie's had not, apparently, undergone the slightest alteration;—a strong proof that he possessed some of that self-command which is one of the requisites of good breeding. But it is certain that the picture suffered on such occasions. I have before observed that he could not converse according to his best manner, unless convinced that he should be listened to with pleasure and candour; nor could he paint according to his best manner, unless he felt a perfect conviction that the person whom he painted, and the person's friends, had an entire reliance on his talents and execution. If he saw that they sat reluctantly ; if he suspected that they or their connections preferred another artist, and feared that he was not able to succeed to their wishes, his hand was, as it were, paralysed ; he became as impatient to dismiss them, as they were to be dismissed ; and the picture thus finished, proved usually an unsatisfactory one to the artist and his employers. Well do I remember the pleasure Mr. Opie expressed on reading a proverb in one act, taken from the French of *Carmonet*, and published by Mr. Holcroft, with

other entertaining things, in his Theatrical Recorder.—Mr. Opie came down to read it to me, declaring that it described so exactly the martyrdom which portrait-painters undergo, he could scarcely believe that he did not write it himself.

Of all persons of worship, he was the most eager to paint Mr. Fox, whose character he loved, and whose talents he venerated: but it was with fear and anxiety that he began a task so arduous and so interesting; because he knew that to the result of his labours many an eager and expecting eye would be turned, and because he felt a grateful desire to execute his task so as to satisfy his generous employer. Nor did he find his task easier than he expected it would be; for, with almost the single exception of Mr. Coke himself, (for whom he painted the picture,) he was not much encouraged to proceed on his work by the praises of Mr. Fox's companions and friends, though their remarks were always made with gentleness and urbanity;—while the impatience of the sitter to have the task of sitting over, added no little to the anxiety of the painter.

Mr. Fox saw and felt for the uneasiness that Mr. Opie experienced, and with his usual kindness and good sense he said to him one day,—“Mr. Opie, don't mind what those people say, for after all you must know better than they do.” The picture under all these disadvantages was,



however, finished ; and pleased, at least, the many : and what was of most consequence, it satisfied Mr. Coke ;—but it never entirely satisfied the ambition of the painter ; though, as I find in the 7th number of *The Artist*, it was, “for perfect harmony of tone,” admired by the best judges. However, when exhibited, the portrait was an object of interest and approbation ; and Mr. Fox, who sat opposite to Mr. Opie at the Academy dinner, and overheard the general tribute paid to the strength of the resemblance, said to him across the table,—“There, Mr. Opie, you see I was right ; every body thinks it could not be better : now if I had minded you, and consented to sit again, you most probably would have spoiled the picture.”

I shall now come to the closing scenes of a life so dear and so valuable ; but I cannot dwell on them minutely, nor can I be expected to do so. Great as my misery must have been at such a moment under any circumstances, it was, if possible, aggravated by my being deprived of the consolation and benefit of my father's presence and advice at that most trying period of my life, for he was attending the sick-bed of his, apparently, dying mother. Yet *she* recovered, at the age of eighty-five, to the perfect enjoyment of life and happiness ; while Mr. Opie was cut off in the very prime of his days ! But let me dwell on the brighter side of the picture. Let me be thankful for the blessing I experienced in the presence of that sister

so dear to my husband, who, by sharing with me the painful yet precious tasks of affection, enabled me to keep from his bed all hired nurses, all attendants but our deeply-interested selves,—that was indeed a consolation: but it was not my only one; for I received in those awful moments such kindnesses and such obligations as can never be repaid by me, except the indelible sentiments of gratitude which they excited in me may hope to be considered as adequate payment. Such was the general interest which Mr. Opie's illness occasioned, and such the anxiety experienced at his danger, that strangers seemed to consider themselves as acquaintances, and thronged our door with inquiries; while acquaintances behaved like friends; and from friends we experienced the attentive tenderness of the nearest relations. Much did I need, and greatly did I value, their support; as only one of my relations (Dr. Woodhouse) was with me during my trial, and (together with Mr. Thomson, R. A. who in early life was Mr. Opie's pupil, and always his companion and his friend,) shared with affectionate solicitude our exertions and our anxieties.

I need not tell you that if any human powers, whether of skill, or affection, or attention, could have saved him, he would have been saved; for you were one of those kind friends who remained near us till every hope was over: and to your well-timed, though unsolicited, inter-

ference I owe, under circumstances as *difficult* and *delicate* as they were agonizing and overwhelming, the support and sanction of Sir John St. Aubyn's presence and advice, that early and just appreciator of the merits of Mr. Opie, who, through the whole of his professional career, united the kindness of a friend to the services of a patron; and who, by manners the most engaging and attentions the most flattering, secured from the grateful and deeply-feeling heart of my husband, the fullest return both of affection and respect.

But I should be wanting in every good and honourable feeling, if I were to omit paying this public tribute of gratitude to Mr. Carlyle and Dr. Ashe, who, refusing all pecuniary remuneration, attended for nearly a month, twice or three times, nay sometimes four times a-day, with the most indefatigable attention and gratifying solicitude;—or to Mr. Cline, who attended as consulting surgeon; or to Dr. Pitcairne, Dr. Baillie, and Dr. Vaughan, who, without any other reward than the pleasing consciousness of doing all in their power to preserve the life of a man who was an ornament to his country, gave me, by their daily presence and advice during the last days of the illness, the soothing conviction that we had left no human means untried to ward off the inevitable blow. It is also highly gratifying to me to reflect that, while Mr. Opie's consciousness remained unimpaired, I had it

in my power, to gratify his feelings by informing him of the general interest which his indisposition excited, from the prince to the menial. He had likewise the satisfaction of knowing that his brother-artists were eager to offer him their best services on the occasion. Mr. Northcote, whom circumstances had made for some time a stranger at our house, hastened thither, as well as Mr. Owen, to promise their assistance, as members of the council at that time, in obtaining leave for Mr. Opie to finish his pictures at Somerset House, should his recovery take place before the opening of the Exhibition; well knowing that on this subject his mind was excessively anxious, and being kindly eager to do all in their power to make it easy. Mr. Northcote was admitted to his bedside: and Mr. Opie, after having spoken to him on the subject of his pictures, entered into so luminous and discriminating a criticism on some papers lately printed on Art, that, eager to catch at the slightest glimmering of hope, I listened with delighted attention to all he said; led away by the weak and ill-founded, though comforting idea, that, as Mr. Opie's mental powers remained so vigorous and unimpaired, the chance of his recovering his physical strength was by no means at an end. But in a very few hours more, I saw that fine mind completely overthrown, and learned to feel in all its acuteness the bitterness of disappointed hope.

*H*

But to Mr. Thomson's offers of assistance at this period (whose attention, indeed, was throughout as useful and well-timed as it was kind and disinterested,) I owe the greatest satisfaction that it was in my power to experience at such a moment, and the most soothing consciousness which I have now to look back upon, when I revert to the painful scenes of the illness; namely, the *certainty* that my husband's *last perceptions* in this world were of a *pleasurable nature*.

Circumstances had kept Mr. Thomson also from our house during the few preceding months; but when he heard of the illness, and that it was likely to be a prolonged one, he offered to finish (as soon as he had completed his own) such of Mr. Opie's pictures as he was most desirous should appear in the Exhibition. When I communicated Mr. Thomson's offer to my husband, he desired me, with an expression of *joy* which I shall never forget, to call him to his bedside; and he eagerly requested him to finish the robes and background of the Duke of Gloucester's portrait, and also that of Mrs. R. Heathcote in the character of Miranda;—but the latter was not sufficiently advanced to be completed in time; and it was the Duke's picture only that Mr. Thomson undertook to work upon. On Saturday morning (the day on which the pictures were to be delivered at Somerset House)

Mr. Thomson brought the portrait of the Duke to the foot of the bed ; and though the delirium attending Mr. Opie's complaint was then begun, " the ruling passion strong in death " conquered it awhile, and he made his remarks on what his friend had done for him, as clearly and as justly as if he had been in perfect health.—" I think," said he, " there is not colour enough in the background." Mr. Thomson owned the justice of the remark, and having added more colour brought it again into the room.—Mr. Opie then looked at it with the greatest satisfaction, and said with a smile, " It will do now.—Take it away—it will do now.—Indeed, if you can't do it, nobody can." And the delirium seemed to take its turn from this circumstance,—this *happy* circumstance, of his knowing that the portrait concerning which he was most anxious would appear at the Exhibition : for he was painting, in idea, on it till the last closing hour of his life ; and his countenance gave me the consolation of knowing that his feelings were comfortable ones, and that he was conscious neither of our misery, nor of his own situation.

The general and individual regret which the death of Mr. Opie occasioned, and the honours paid to his memory, so flattering to him, so soothing to me, and so honourable to those who paid them, proved, undeniably, how truly society feels the value, and how deeply it laments, " the loss of a man of genius."

You have said that Mr. Opie was ambitious,—honourably so I mean ; and the following anecdote proves the truth of the assertion :—When Sir Joshua died, and it was known that he was to be buried in St. Paul's, Mr. Opie triumphantly and prophetically as it were exclaimed to his sister,—“Aye, girl ! and I too shall be buried in St. Paul's !” He was so : and as we always hold sacred the wishes of the dead, whom we have fondly loved while living, *I bless God* that *I* was *able* to bury him there !—Nor shall I ever cease to remember with gratitude and satisfaction the long and honourable procession which attended him thither ! So general seemed the wish to do his memory honour by such an attendance, that, of those who were invited to attend, scarcely any sent a refusal, and two only who had accepted the invitation staid away without giving an adequate reason for their absence. Well may Mr. Boaden say, that a public tribute like this “ must strike the moral eye with the purest pleasure as the triumph of genius ! as a lesson which of itself teaches industry, and honour, affection, and gratitude\*.”

Here I shall conclude my long and melancholy task, a

\* It is worthy of remark that, with the exception of Sir J. St. Aubyn, Mr. Whitbread, and my highly esteemed friend Mr. W. Smith, the pall-bearers were gentlemen neither long nor intimately known to Mr. Opie ; and were therefore led to attend by no motives of personal regard, but simply by their wish to do honour to departed genius.

task which has awakened in me emotions the most painful ; as dwelling on the merits of him who has been taken from me, could not fail to deepen every regret for his loss. But I shall never lament that I did undertake, and did execute the task, however I may be censured for having undertaken it at all, or for having executed it so unworthily.—Whatever were the faults of Mr. Opie, admitting that I was aware of them, it was not for me to bring them forward to public view ; and the real worth of his character in domestic life, I only can be supposed to know with accuracy and precision : and I most solemnly aver, that I have not said in his praise a single word that I do not believe to be strictly true ;—but it was my business to copy the art of the portrait-painter, who endeavours to give a general rather than a detailed likeness of a face, and, while he throws its trivial defects into shadow, brings forward its perfections in the strongest point of view.

There is one satisfaction that I shall derive from having written this little work, which no censures, no criticisms, no critics can deprive me of ; and that is, the well-founded hope that by means of these tributary pages my name will descend with Mr. Opie's to posterity :—for as the gums of the East give perpetuity amongst Eastern nations to the bodies of the dead, so the merit of Mr. Opie's work will



ensure immortality to mine; and this public testimony to his virtues, borne by her who KNEW him, and who LOVED him best, will live, I trust, as a memorial of my gratitude to him, for nine years of nearly uninterrupted happiness.

Believe me, dear Sir,

with grateful respect and esteem,

your obedient servant,

AMELIA OPIE.

**THE SEVENTH NUMBER**  
**OF**  
**THE ARTIST.**



*Saturday, April 25, 1807.*

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TO  
THE MEMORY  
OF  
JOHN OPIE,  
THE VII<sup>TH</sup> NUMBER OF *THE ARTIST*  
IS INSCRIBED,  
AMIDST THE UNITED  
SORROW, AFFECTION, AND RESPECT,  
OF THOSE WHO WERE HIS ASSOCIATES  
IN THE PRESENT UNDERTAKING;  
THE FRIENDS OF HIS PRIVATE LIFE,  
AND  
ADMIRERS OF HIS PROFESSIONAL EMINENCE.

"Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise,  
(That last infirmity of noble mind)  
To scorn delights, and live laborious days;  
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,  
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,  
Comes the blind Fury with abhorred shears,  
And slits the thin spun life."—

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**F**EW men have attained to eminence by a more irregular course of study, by stronger native endowments, or by more determined industry, than the great painter whose name at this moment inspires public regret. The child of humble life, born in a remote and secluded part of the island, with little or inferior education, such as humble and busy parents could bestow, he was destined to transplant to the bosom of the metropolis the hardy products of a sound and vigorous intellect, and to add strength and lustre to civil cultivation.

JOHN ORIE was born in May, 1761, in the parish of St. Agnes, about seven miles from the town of Truro. His father and grandfather were reputable master-carpenters in that neighbourhood. His mother was descended from the ancient and respectable family of Tonkin, of Trevannance in Cornwall, and, amongst his ancestors in that line, is mentioned the author of a valuable history of Cornwall, which was left nearly finished, and is at present in the possession of Lord De Dunstanville.

He was very early remarkable for the strength of his understanding, and for the rapidity with which he acquired all the learning that a village school could afford him. When ten years old, he was not only able to solve many difficult problems of Euclid, but was thought capable of instructing others: and such was his increasing confidence in his own superior powers, that he had scarcely reached his twelfth year, when he set up an evening school in St. Agnes, and taught arithmetic and writing, for the latter of which he was excellently qualified, as he wrote many various hands with admirable ease and accuracy; and he reckoned among his pupils some who were nearly twice his own age.

His father was very solicitous to bring him up in his own business, and to this end bound him apprentice to himself; but the soaring mind of the boy could not submit itself to drudge in the employment of a common man.

The love of drawing and painting seems to have given a very early bias to his inclinations; and the manner in which it disclosed itself cannot be considered as uninteresting.

Emulation appears to have first lighted up the ready flame. About the tenth year of his age, seeing one of his companions, whose name was Mark Oates (now a captain in the marine service), engaged in drawing a butterfly, he looked eagerly, in silence, at the performance: on being asked what he was thinking of, he replied, " he was thinking that he could draw a butterfly, if he was to try, as well as Mark Oates." He accordingly made the experiment, and triumphed; and he returned home to his father's house in high spirits, on account of the victory he had obtained.

From this moment the bent of his talents was determined. It happened soon afterwards, that his father being employed in the repairs of a gentleman's house in Truro, young Opie attended him: in the parlour hung a picture of a *Farm-yard*, probably of humble execution, but of sufficient merit to attract his notice; and he took every opportunity of stealing from his father's side to contemplate the beauties of this performance, which, in his eye, were of the highest class. His father, catching him in one of these secret visits, corrected him; but this had little effect; he was soon again at the door of the parlour,

where being seen by the mistress of the house, he was, by her interference, permitted to view the picture without interruption. On his return home in the evening, his first care was to procure canvass and colours, and he immediately began to paint a resemblance of the *Farm-yard*. The next day he returned to the house, and again in the evening resumed his task at home. In this manner, in the course of a few days, by the force of memory only, he transmitted to his own canvass a very tolerable copy of the picture.

Nearly by the same methods, he copied a picture of several figures hunting, which he saw in the window of a house-painter. In his copy, however, he had, in compliance with the *costume* of his neighbourhood, placed a *huntress* upon a pad instead of a side-saddle, and being laughed at for this mistake, he some time afterwards destroyed his copy.

The love of painting had thus so thoroughly established its dominion over his whole mind, that nothing could now divert him from engaging in it as a profession : his father, however, still treated his attempts with great severity, and used his utmost endeavours to check a pursuit, which he considered as likely to prove injurious to his son's future prosperity ; but the aspiring views of the young artist met with a zealous supporter in another part of his family : his father's brother, a man of strong understanding, and more-



over an excellent arithmetician, continued to view his progress with pleasure, and encouraged him in his desire of learning, by jocularly complimenting him with the name of *the little Sir Isaac*, in consideration of the knowledge he displayed in mathematics.

He therefore followed his new studies with ardour, and had already attained a competent skill in portrait-painting, and had hung his father's house with the pictures of his family, and of his youthful companions, when he became accidentally known to Dr. Wolcot, then residing at Truro (and since so celebrated under the title of *Peter Pindar*), who having himself some skill in painting, a sound judgment, and a few tolerable pictures, was well fitted to afford instruction, and various advantages, to the young scholar.

Thus assisted and recommended, his fame found its way through the country, and so rapid was his progress, that he now commenced professed portrait-painter, and went to many of the neighbouring towns, with letters of introduction to all the considerable families resident in them.

One of these expeditions was to Padstow, whither he set forward, dressed, as usual, in a boy's plain short jacket, and carrying with him all proper apparatus for portrait-painting. Here, amongst others, he painted the whole household of the ancient and respectable family of *Prideaux*; even to the dogs and cats of the family. He re-

mained so long absent from home, that some uneasiness began to arise on his account, but it was dissipated by his returning dressed in a handsome coat, with very long skirts, laced ruffles, and silk stockings. On seeing his mother, he ran to her, and, taking out of his pocket twenty guineas, which he had earned by his pencil, he desired her to keep them; adding, that, in future, he should maintain himself.

The first efforts of his pencil, though void of that grace which can only be derived from an intimate knowledge of the art, were true to nature, and in a style far superior to any thing in general produced by country artists. He painted at that time with smaller pencils, and finished more highly than he afterwards did when his hand had attained a broader and more masterly execution: but several of his early portraits would not have disgraced even the high name he has since attained. Towards the end of the year 1777, when he was sixteen years of age, he brought to Penryn a head he had painted of himself for the late Lord Bateman, who was then at that place with his regiment (the Hereford Militia), and who was an early patron of Mr. Opie, employing him to paint pictures of old men, beggars, &c. in subjects of which kind he was principally engaged, and which he treated with surprising force, and truth of representation.

At length, still under the auspices of Dr. Wolcot, he came to London, where his reception, and his continued

progress, are the fit objects of the biographer. It is the purpose of this paper to delineate solely his *character*, as a man, a scholar, and an Artist.

Mr. Opie's ruling passion was ambition,—but ambition tending to the use and delight of mankind. It impelled him to eminence in his art, and it displayed itself in a resolution always decided, sometimes impetuous, to obtain every distinction which his path in life laid open to him. Accustomed in childhood to prove himself superior to his companions, the desire of competition became unextinguishable. Wherever eminence appeared, he felt and eagerly shewed himself its rival. He was forward to claim the honours, which he was still more diligent to deserve. He regarded every honourable acquisition as a victory, and expressed with openness the delight he experienced in success. On the professorship of painting in the Royal Academy becoming vacant by Mr. Barry's dismissal, he offered himself a candidate; and being told that he had a competitor, whose learning and talents pre-eminently entitled him to that office, he replied, that he abstained from farther interference, but that the person who had been proposed was the only one in whose favour he would willingly resign his pretensions: consistently with this declaration, on Mr. Fuseli's appointment to the office of keeper, he renewed his claim, and was elected.

Examples of a mind more open to the reception of

knowledge, more undaunted by difficulty, more unwearied in attainment, are rarely to be found. Conducted to London, by the hand of one who discerned his yet unveiled merit, he approached the centre of an exalted country with the liveliest hopes: he met its flatteries with trembling; and he viewed its unfeeling caprice with the sensitive emotions of genius, but with the unconquerable force of sense and judgment. An intellect, naturally philosophic, soon discovered to him that he was not born to depend on the frivolous conceit of crowds, but to command the respect of the great and wise. He bent his powers to the formation of his own mind; he applied himself to reading; he sought the society of the learned; ardent in his researches, boldly investigating truth, pertinacious (though not overbearing) in argument, while he elicited light from his opponent, and steady to principles which he found could not be shaken by controversy: in this manner, while an unremitting perseverance, superior to the neglect of the multitude, maintained the cunning of his hand, he became a scholar and a *painter*.

The Life of Reynolds, published in Dr. Wolcot's edition of Pilkington's Dictionary, was the first specimen of his literary ability. In this he displayed a profound knowledge of the subject, a quick and powerful perception of distinctive character, and a mastery of language little to

be expected from a youth, who was supposed to have been destitute of learning.

He next published a letter in a daily paper [The True Briton] (since re-published in "An Inquiry into the requisite Cultivation of the Arts of Design in England,") in which he proposed a distinct plan for the formation of a *National Gallery*, tending at once to exalt the arts of his country, and immortalize its glories. To this he annexed his name, in consistence with the openness of character which at all times distinguished his actions.

His lectures at the Royal Institution followed:—These were a spirited attempt to display the depths of his professional knowledge, amidst a circle assembled for entertainment and fashionable delight. His lectures impressed respect on his audience: they were full of instructive materials; they taught the principles of painting, and presented an accumulation of maxims founded on history and observation. But to whatever praise they might vindicate a claim, they never satisfied their author; and he declined the continuance of them. His election to the professorship of painting at the Royal Academy happening nearly at this time, he resolved to perfect what he had perceived defective; and he read at Somerset House four lectures, which, avoiding any collision with the brilliant specimens of erudition and imagination which had

immediately preceded him in that place, appeared to have been unequalled in their kind.

In his former lectures at the Royal Institution, he was abrupt, crowded, and frequently unmethodical; rather rushing forward himself, than leading his auditors, to the subject. In the latter lectures, he was more regular, progressive, distinct, instructive; and delivered a mixture of humorous and impassioned sentiment in a strain of clear, natural, and flowing eloquence. Here he found his genius roused, and his whole faculties adequately excited; and he shone more as professor at the Academy, than as lecturer at the Institution, because he was more formed by nature and application to address the studious and philosophic, than the light and gay. He possessed no superficial graces, either in his conversation or professional practice. Every thing in him was manly, resolute, energetic; yielding little to fashion, nothing to caprice; less addressed even to fancy than to judgment; in no measure adapted to catch a careless glance, but fitted to awaken thought, and gratify reflection.

It has been said by some who most probably never exchanged a word with Mr. Opie, that his mind was without cultivation. That this was not the case is plain from what has been related. It may not be amiss to notice, that Mr. Opie read French well, and understood some-

thing of Latin and music ; all attained by his own unceasing application.

It would be an omission of public duty not to add, that to whatever degree of respect Mr. Opie's talents finally raised him, he may yet be brought forward as another instance in which we have cause to regret the want of established public direction of his art. After the first flow of curiosity on his arrival in London had subsided, and when he could no longer be " the wonder of the day," " the boy drawn out from a tin-mine in Cornwall," his real qualities ceased to attract attention, and, what was worse, employment. His respectable and amiable patron, Sir John St. Aubyn, stood his friend at that interesting moment; and among many, who might well have been proud to share the honour, he stood alone. But " the progress of morals," says Lord Kaim, " is slow ; the progress of taste still slower."

The effects produced by hours of despondence on a mind so strongly gifted, who can measure? His intellectual strength however prevailed ; the force of his endowments gradually, though slowly, raised him once more to admiration and to fame ; the conscious sense of acknowledged merit re-animated his efforts ; he exerted himself with perseverance, and rose to renown ;—he appeared to feel that he had just reached again the level of his self-

opinion, when death extinguished his talents and his ambition.

*P. HOARE.*

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Mr. Opie expired on Thursday April 9, 1807. He had been attended by Dr. Ash, Dr. Vaughan, and Mr. Carlisle, with the addition, during the latter stage of his illness, of Dr. Pitcairn and Dr. Baillie. The symptoms of his disorder were extraordinary. On dissection, the lower portion of the spinal marrow, and its investing membrane, were found slightly inflamed, and the brain surcharged with blood; with other accordant appearances, constituting a case of most rare occurrence in the records of medicine.

On Monday, the 20th instant, his remains were interred in St. Paul's Cathedral, near to those of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

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Mr. Opie is next to be spoken of as a painter, in which rank he stood deservedly eminent. The general merits of his works, the masterly boldness of effect, the simplicity of composition and artless attitudes, the strength of character, the expression of individual nature, are too well



known to be here dwelt on. Amongst his best historical pictures, may be reckoned the *Murder of James I. King of Scotland*, *The Presentation in the Temple*, *Jephthah's Vow*; *The Death of Rizzio*, *Arthur taken Prisoner*, and *Arthur with Hubert*. It would be endless to enumerate all that might be praised: his *Juliet in the Garden*, *Escape of Gil Blas*, *Musidora*, and some others, remaining in his gallery, are amongst the most valuable.

His latter portraits rank with the highest; those of men are distinguished by force and character; those of women by an unaffected air, and simplicity of colouring.

The following observations on Mr. Opie's merits in painting, are from high professional authority in his art (*MR. WEST, President of the Royal Academy*).

MR. OPIE's conception of his subject was original, and his arrangement of it ideal: his execution depended, in great measure, on the character of the model which he placed before him for imitation in finishing the parts. He painted what he saw, in the ~~most~~ masterly manner, and he varied little from it. He rather bent his subject to the figure, than the figure to his subject.

That may be said of Opie, which can only be truly said of the highest geniuses, that he saw nature in one point more distinctly and forcibly than any painter that ever lived. *The truth of colour, as conveyed to the eye through*

*the atmosphere, by which the distance of every object is ascertained*, was never better expressed than by him. He distinctly represented local colour in all its various tones and proportions, whether in light or in shadow, with a perfect uniformity of imitation. Other painters frequently make two separate colours of objects, in light, and in shade: Opie never. With him no colour, whether white, black, primary, or compound, ever, in any situation, lost its respective hue.

For the expression of truth, which he was thus powerful in giving, it was requisite that he should see, or have seen, the object itself in the peculiar situation. The impression never left him, and he transmitted the image with fidelity to the canvass. He resigned himself unwillingly to fancy: yet examples are not wanting, both in historical subjects, and in portraits, in which he added to the subject before him with felicity. His *Arthur supplicating Hubert* (among many others) had an expression which certainly he did not find in his model. In the portrait of an artist, exhibited last year at Somerset House, he gave to the representation an ideal elegance, which rendered the head truly poetical, without in any manner detracting from the likeness.

His pictures possessed, in an eminent degree, what painters call *breadth*. They were deficient in some of the more refined distinctions which mark the highly polished

works of Raffaele, Titian, or Reynolds ; but they displayed so invariable an appearance of truth, as seemed sufficient to make a full apology, if it had been wanted, for the absence of all the rest.

On his canvass, in general, no heterogeneous tones appeared : all was played in one key. This principle was observed with the extremest nicety in *single figures*, though not always equally in the *whole*. The figure and the back ground were each *separately* just, but they did not always harmonize. One of the happiest instances of his labours, in the perfect harmony of tone, is the picture of *Belisarius*, at present in the British Gallery, and soon to add value to that of the Marquis of Stafford. His portrait of Mr. Fox, in the Exhibition of 1805, and that of the Duke of Gloucester, which will be seen in the ensuing one, are examples of similar excellence.

In his drawing, the same principle prevailed as in his colouring. Every thing was homogeneous ; every thing was marked with precision, and in its place. He gave vivacity and force of expression to every subject of his pencil.

## JOHN OPIE, Esq. R. A.

*PROFESSOR OF PAINTING TO THE ROYAL ACADEMY.*

A man, whose intellectual powers, and indefatigable industry in their cultivation, rendered him at once an honour to the county from which he originated, and an example of imitation to mankind !

Born in a rank of life, in which the road to eminence is rendered infinitely difficult, unassisted by partial patronage, scorning with virtuous pride all slavery of dependence, he trusted alone for his reward to the force of his natural powers, and to well directed and unremitting study ; and he demonstrated by his works, how highly he was endowed by nature with strength of judgment and originality of conception. His thoughts were always new and striking, as they were the genuine offspring of his own mind ; and it was difficult to say if his conversation gave more amusement or instruction.

The toil or difficulties of his profession were by him considered as matter of honourable and delightful contest ; and it might be said of him, that he did not so much paint to live, as live to paint.

As a son, he was an example of duty to an aged parent. He was studious, yet not severe ; he was eminent, yet not

vain: his disposition so tranquil and forgiving, that it was the reverse of every tincture of sour or vindictive; and what to some might have appeared as roughness of manner, was only the effect of an honest indignation towards that which he conceived to be error.

How greatly have we cause to lament that so much talent, united to so much industry, perseverance, and knowledge, should have been prematurely snatched from the world, which it would have delighted with its powers, and benefited by its example!

*J. NORTHCOTE.*

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## A TRIBUTE

TO THE MEMORY OF OPIE.

How oft of late, o'er worth departed shed,  
The tears of Britain have embalm'd the dead!  
Bewail'd the hero's fall—the sage's fate,  
While public virtue sorrow'd thro' the state!  
Yet still unsated with the noblest prey,  
Ungorg'd, tho' meaner multitudes decay,  
'Gainst wit and genius Death directs his dart,  
And strikes thro' Opie's side to Painting's heart.  
Fall'n from the zenith of his proud career,  
Full in his fame, and sparkling in his sphere!  
While o'er his art he shed his brightest rays,  
And warm'd the world of letters into praise.

No feeble follower of a style or school ;  
 No slave of system in the chains of rule :  
 By his own strength his merits he amass'd  
 And liv'd, no dull dependent on the past :  
 His genius kindling from within was fir'd,  
 And first in nature's rudest wild aspir'd.

Warm at her shrine his early vows he paid,  
 Secur'd her smile, and sought no other aid :  
 Enraptur'd still her charms alone explor'd,  
 And to the last with lovers' faith ador'd.  
 For when ambition bade his steps advance,  
 To scenes where Painting spreads her vast expanse :  
 When all the charts of taste before him lay,  
 That show'd how former keels had cut their way,  
 With fearless prow he put to sea, and steer'd  
 His steady course, where her pure light appear'd.  
 His vigorous pencil, in pursuit of art,  
 Disdain'd to dwell on each minuter part,  
 Impressive force—impartial truth he sought,  
 And travel'd in no beaten track of thought.  
 Unlike the servile herd, whom we behold  
 Casting their dressy ore in fashion's mould ;  
 His metal by no common die is known,  
 The coin is sterling, and the stamp his own.

Opie, farewell !—accept this feeble verse,  
 This flow'r of friendship cast upon thy hearth !  
 Though Fate severe, in life's unfaded prime,  
 Hath shook thee rudely from the tree of time,  
 Thy laurel thro' the lapse of years shall bloom,  
 And weeping Art attend thee to the tomb :

While Taste, no longer tardy to bestow  
 The garland due to graphic skill below,  
 Shall point to Time thy labours, as he flies,  
 And brighten all their beauties in his eyes,  
 Exalt the Painter, now the man 's no more,  
 And bid thy country honour and deplore!

*M. A. SHEE.*

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WHEN merely a rich man, or a nobleman, departs this life, his treasures and his titles are transferred to another, and the world loses nothing. But when an artist dies! when that hand is for ever motionless, which was uniformly employed in the production of works of eminent art; when that mind is for ever fled, whose deepest thoughts were all devoted to a noble science, the world sustains a loss of one of its most rare possessions—a man of genius!

Such is the deprivation which every admirer of the talents of the late Mr. Opie must feel upon his decease. But, in deploring the death of this studious artist, there is a consolation, of no small importance, in recurring to the simplicity of his life.

The total absence of artificial manners was the most remarkable characteristick, and at the same time the adornment and the deformity, of Mr. Opie.

His habitual ruggedness of address was stigmatized by the courtly observer with the appellation of ill-breeding; whilst a plainer and wiser description of persons found, in this contempt of affectation, such a security from design, either upon their hearts or their understandings, that they willingly yielded him both: and they made this sacrifice, with a kind of joyful astonishment, to observe, that where the Graces never appeared—the Virtues acted for them.

*E. INCHBALD.*



*TO THE EDITOR.***MY DEAR SIR,**

Tuesday, April 21, 1807.

You are pleased to desire that I will close the paper which you have, with so much feeling and propriety, devoted to our late friend. Well do I know how little even a life passed in the contemplation of art, enables him who is not a professor, to speak with propriety upon the subject, or for the most part to rise beyond a half-learned technical jargon, the delusion indeed of ignorance, but the scoff of the artist.

Yet to one point, even of his professional merits, I am competent to speak, and my appeal for confirmation of what I say, shall be to the illustrious body of which he was a member. I mean the path which he chose to tread, when ascending to the summit of reputation. There was nothing indirect, specious, or false about him, and I am sure he would have died without fame, had it been unattainable without cabal. His virtues never tricked themselves out to catch favour, and to form party: it became a sort of test;—he who was not born for truth and manliness, could not love Opie.

But this was only carrying into the Academy the same

qualities which endeared him to his private friends. In Opie you were sure to find a mind which deferred only to superior force. He was no retailer of notions originating in folly, and propagated without examination as undeniable truths. Upon whatever subject he conversed, you saw that he took nothing upon trust, and you were sure to find the hardy feature of his character stamped upon his sentiments. This was the principle in him, that developed itself in those admirable lectures, which we all heard with so much delight. In some instances, he had to combat with prejudice, to censure power and affluence—but he disdained all shuffling and compromise, when the glory of his art and his country called upon him for the plain truth. He met the enemy in the gate: he was not satisfied with the discharge of an unowned shaft from the loop-hole of a distant tower.

I know that to some this frank, open conduct appeared uncalled-for; nay, I have even heard it termed coarse: but the coarse man is he who says a rude thing in bad language, and not he who with a noble simplicity comes immediately to the point, and, when he has obtained conviction, in the plainest words delivers his judgment. If I were to attempt to characterize him in one word (I should most certainly use that word to the honour of our species) it would be, that he was a genuine ENGLISHMAN—affection he despised, and flattery he abhorred.

Such was the man whom we have lost—lost too at that period, when he was beginning to reap the rewards of labour, and enjoy the fame of great talents. And here I should close this very imperfect sketch of an admirable character, did I not feel myself called upon to notice, in terms of sincere admiration, the just tribute to his remains, which we yesterday witnessed in St. Paul's Cathedral. When it is remembered that this proceeded from pious respect, and that there were assembled superior talents in every elegant art, and friendship collected from every department of cultivated life\*, it must strike the moral eye with the purest pleasure, as the triumph of genius! as a lesson, which of itself teaches industry and honour, affection and gratitude.

*J. BOADEN.*

\* The Pall-bearers were, Lord De Dunstanville, Sir J. St. Aubyn, Sir J. F. Leicester, Hon. Mr. Elphinstone, Mr. Whitbread, and Mr. W. Smith. The President and Members of the Royal Academy followed, with other numerous Friends.

# EPITAPH

ON

JOHN OPIE, Esq., R. A.

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WHAT though nor rank nor affluence grac'd the birth  
Of him who now rejoins our parent Earth,  
NATURE for higher ends his course design'd,  
And gave the rich nobility of MIND :  
Hence while he liv'd the Wealthy and the Great  
Might view with envy his superior fate ;  
Nor as his Equals can they e'er appear  
Till Death has levell'd them like OPIE here ;  
And still, while they in dark oblivion lie,  
The name his Genius rais'd shall Death defy.



## NOTE.

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THE Four Lectures on Painting, now presented to the Public, in their complete form, as they were delivered at the Royal Academy, constitute the larger part of that system of Professional Instruction, which their enlightened Author appears to have had in his view.

In his first Lecture he will be found to have divided the subject of his Art into six branches; four of which he calls the Practical or Physical Elements of Painting; and the other two, the Intellectual. The former are: *Design*, or *Drawing*; *Colouring*; *Chiaro Scuro*; *Composition*: The latter, *Invention*; *Expression*.

The present Lectures treat: the 1st, of Design; the 2d, of Invention; the 3d, of Chiaro Scuro; the 4th, of Colouring.

As Mr. Opie's manuscripts were intrusted to my care immediately after his decease, I think it requisite to declare that the Lectures are faithfully printed from them.

P. HOARE.

MAY 1, 1809.



# LECTURE I.

READ AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

*February 16, 1807.*





# LECTURE I.

READ AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

*February 16, 1807.*

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GENTLEMEN,

**I**F the difficulties of your professor's task have always been at least equal to the honour of his situation, they must surely at present be allowed to preponderate considerably, by his having to come after one to whom all sources of knowledge were open, who to a mass of well digested materials, possessed by none but himself, joined an imagination capable of illustrating and enlivening the driest subject, and placing it in the most various and striking points of view, and the force of whose eloquence must have made an indelible impression on all who ever had the pleasure of hearing it.

Such indeed is the magnitude of the undertaking, that, though I have practised long and studied much, I should

shrink from it in despair, did I not hope to find you prepared almost to anticipate every advice, eager to catch every hint, and ready to second my endeavours with earnest and unceasing diligence. Aided by such a disposition on your part, I have no doubt that even my feeble powers may do much; but you must always remember that the responsibility for your progress, does not lie wholly with me. If you are wanting to yourselves, rule may be multiplied upon rule, and precept upon precept in vain, and all the talents of all the professors that ever lived, far from rendering you any essential service, would only tend to cover you with deeper and more irrecoverable disgrace.

What I have to offer, will in general be found to correspond with the opinions of those who have written on the subject before: sometimes, however, I have ventured to leave the beaten track; but I can honestly say, that it has never happened through negligence, caprice, or vanity.—Truth, not novelty, has invariably been my object; and, in order more effectually to arrive at this point, I now give notice that if any gentleman, student or otherwise, will have the goodness to set down any doubts or objections he may have as to the clearness or soundness of any point I insist on, and communicate them to me, I will next year, if not before, endeavour to satisfy him by a farther explanation, or by retracting my opinion if I find it untenable.

The writers on painting seem in general not less solicitous than those on most other arts, of tracing it back to the remotest periods of antiquity; some ascribing it to divine, others to human origin, some giving it an antediluvian birth, whilst others are content to take it up on this side the deluge, and warm themselves in settling the pretensions of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Persians, Indians and other early nations, to the honour of having been it's first parents and protectors.

Having neither leisure nor inclination to enter into disputes which promise to be as endless, as unproductive of any thing beneficial either in regard to the theory or practice of the art, I shall confine myself to such observations on it's origin, as rise naturally from considering it's principles, without reference to historical evidence of any kind whatever.

The rudiments of painting appear to me so congenial to the mind of man, that they may almost be said to be born with it. The art is a language that must exist, in some greater or less degree, whenever the human intellect approaches a certain, and that by no means an elevated, standard. Instead therefore of asking where it *was*, I should be more inclined to ask where it *was not* invented, as the more difficult question to solve: for on the slightest consideration it cannot but be obvious, that men in the earliest, and every period, *must* (from natural causes) have been impressed with an idea of the elements of art. The shadows

of plants, animals and other objects, on a plain, the prints of feet in the dust or sand, and the accidental resemblance of lines and patches of colour to faces and human figures, must have given rise to the conception, and pointed out the possibility of imitating the appearances of bodies by lines and colours.—Thus nations in which society appears to be scarcely beyond it's infancy, possess the first rudiments of design before they are acquainted with those of many other arts more useful and almost necessary to their existence; their naked bodies are covered with punctures of various forms, into which indelible colours of various kinds are infused,—whether for ornament or use, to delight their friends, or terrify their enemies, is not easy to determine.

After this first step, the next demand for the art would undoubtedly be to communicate and transmit ideas, to preserve the memory of warlike exploits and remarkable events, and to serve the purposes of piety or superstition; it being a much more obvious and natural expedient to form some picturesque representation of a person or action, than to attempt to give an account of them by means of abstract signs and arbitrary characters; and hence probably are derived the picture-writing of the Mexicans, and the more artful hieroglyphics of the Egyptians.

But though the arts of design are among the first that make their appearance after those absolutely necessary to preserve life, they are perhaps always the very last that

reach perfection : with an almost inextinguishable principle of vitality, they yet require the fervid warmth of the acme of civilization to expand them to their full size, and give them to bear fruits of the highest flavour.

The progress of the arts in every country is the exact and exclusive measure of the progress of refinement : they are reciprocally the cause and effect of each other ; and hence we accordingly find that the most enlightened, the most envied, and the most interesting periods in the history of mankind are precisely those in which the arts have been most esteemed, most cultivated, and have reached their highest points of elevation. To this the bright æras of Alexander the Great, and Leo the Tenth, owe their strongest, their most amiable, and their most legitimate claims to our respect, admiration, and gratitude ; this is their highest and their only undivided honour ; and, if not the column itself, it is certainly (to borrow a metaphor from a celebrated orator) the Corinthian capital of their fame.

The principles of painting comprehend those of all the other arts of design, and indeed of every thing in which the imagination or the passions are immediately addressed through the organs of sight. In this art, (the simplest in it's means and the most powerful in it's effect,) by the mere application of lines and colours, a flat surface is made to recede or project at the will of the artist, he fills it with the most agreeable appearances of nature, and sets before our eyes the images we hold most dear. The empire of the

art extends over all space and time : it brings into view the heroes, sages, and beauties of the earliest periods, the inhabitants of the most distant regions, and fixes and perpetuates the forms of those of the present day ; it presents to us the heroic deeds, the remarkable events, and the interesting examples of piety, patriotism, and humanity of all ages ; and, according to the nature of the action depicted, it fills us with innocent pleasure, excites our abhorrence of crimes, moves us to pity, or inspires us with elevated sentiments.

Nor are it's powers limited by actual or bodily existence ; the world of imagination is all it's own. It ascends the brightest heaven of invention, and selects and combines at pleasure whatever may suit it's purpose.—All that poets yet have feigned, or fear conceived, of uncreate or unembodied being, is subject to it's grasp ; and most truly may it be said to

“ give to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.”

Painting, we are told, consisted, in it's infancy, of mere outlines, and probably for a long time very little exceeded what we now see scrawled in a nursery by children who have never been taught to draw : the next step of the art was to the *monogram*, or the addition of some parts within the contour ; from thence it advanced to the *monochrom*, or paintings of one colour ; and to this quickly succeeded

the *polychrom*, or the application of various colours, performed by covering the different parts of the picture with different hues, much in the same way as we now colour maps; and beyond this the art has never advanced among nations of the East, even to the present time.

But in Greece, happy country! all causes were combined in favour of the progress of the art, as if nature was determined to show for once what the human powers, aided by every circumstance, were capable of accomplishing. Painting was there received with enthusiasm, liberally encouraged, and pursued by a succession of the mightiest geniuses the world ever saw, who with incredible rapidity completed it's elements, by the addition of light and shade to colour, and of action to form, and of expression to action, and composition to expression, and grace to composition: every delicacy of execution and mechanical skill crowned the whole, and the art, in their hands, became adequate to the representation of all that is grand, beautiful, terrific, or pathetic in nature: nor did they stop here; like our immortal bard,

Each change of many-colour'd life they drew,  
Exhausted worlds and then imagin'd new;  
Existence saw them spurn her bounded reign,  
And panting Time toil'd after them in vain.

In short, they not only surpassed all that went before, but have equally baffled every attempt at successful ri-



valry since. From them all that exists of true beauty, grace, and dignified character, in the works of the moderns, not only in painting and sculpture, but in every thing that relates to design, is borrowed. All that is well proportioned, grand, and striking in our architecture, all that is agreeable in the forms of our utensils and furniture, and all that is tasteful and elegant in the dress of our females, is derived immediately from them; and but for them even beauty in nature itself would perhaps at this time have been undiscovered, or so far misunderstood, that we might have preferred the artificially crippled form and sickly corpulence of a Chinese, or the rank and vulgar redundancy of a Flemish or Dutch female.

Nature, as it presents itself to the eye, consists of form, colour, and light and shadow: exactly answerable to these, the principal branches of painting consist likewise of drawing, colouring, and *chiaro scuro*; and as the eye can take in, at once, but a certain portion of nature, the art has another branch to regulate the quantity and disposition of the parts of this portion, called *composition*. These four constitute the practical or physical elements of painting; and their immediate purpose is to produce illusion, deception, or the true bodily effect of things on the organs of sight. And as by the phænomena of form, colour, and light and shade, nature makes us acquainted with all her superior and more interesting qualities, so the cor-

responding branches of painting, through the medium of invention and expression, (the soul of the art,) are made the vehicles of our conceptions of sublimity, beauty, grace, mind, passion, and character.

Invention and expression, being purely intellectual branches, justly bear in consequence a more elevated rank and degree of estimation; but it must never be forgotten that they cannot exist alone; perfection in them presupposes perfection in the humbler and more mechanic parts, which are the instruments, the language of the art: without these a man is no painter; and however extraordinary, abundant, brilliant or refined his ideas, they must die with him; at least he can never manifest them to the world by painting.

To know an art thoroughly, we must know it's object, which, in regard to painting, is not quite so easy as it appears at first: for though all agree that it's purpose is to imitate *nature*, yet the vast superiority possessed by many works of art over others equally challenging to be considered as true and faithful representations of nature, shows that some limitation and explanation of this very extensive and complicated term is necessary to our forming a correct idea of it's meaning in respect to art; without which it will be vain to hold it up as a standard or measure of the various merits of the different works in painting.

The gross vulgarity and meanness of the works of the Dutch ; the pert frivolity and bombast of the French ; the Gothic, dry and tasteless barbarism of the old German, as well as the philosophic grandeur of the Roman school, may all be equally defended on the ground of their being strong and faithful representations of nature of some sort or other. In real objects also, the base and the refined, the dross and the metal, the diamond in it's rough pebble state, as well as when polished, set, and presented in it's brightest blaze, the *goitre* of the Alps, as well as the most perfect beauty, are all equally nature :—but who ever thought them equally proper subjects for the pencil ?

In taking a general view and comparing the productions of art, they will be found easily divisible into three distinct classes, formed upon three distinct principles or modes of seeing nature, and indicative of three distinct ages, or stages of refinement, in the progress of painting. First, those of which the authors, agreeing with Dryden that “ God never made his works for man to mend,” and understanding nature as strictly meaning the visible appearances of things, (any alteration of which would at least be unnecessary and impertinent, if not profane,) have, in consequence, confined themselves to the giving, as far as in them lay, an exact copy or transcript of their originals, as they happened to present themselves, without choice or selection of any kind as to the manner of their being.

Secondly, those in which the artists, departing a little from this bigotry in taste, have ventured to reject what they considered as mean and uninteresting in nature, and endeavoured to choose the most perfect models, and render them in the best point of view. The third class would consist of the works of those who, advanced another step in theory, have looked upon nature as meaning the general principles of things rather than the things themselves, who have made the imitation of real objects give way to the imitation of an idea of them in their utmost perfection, and by whom we find them represented not as they actually are, but as they ought to be.

This last stage of refinement, to which no modern has yet completely arrived, has been called the ideal, the beautiful, or the sublime style of art. It founds its pretensions to superiority on the very superior powers required to excel in it, and on the infinitely greater effect, both as to pleasure and improvement, which it is calculated to produce on the mind of the spectator; and hence the pure, simple, energetic and consistent principle on which it rests, is indubitably to be considered as the true and real interpretation of the term *nature*, always to be kept in view, not only by all who would excel in painting, but by all who wish to attain the highest style in any of the imitative arts.

Many painters and critics, from observing the difficulty

of settling the proper meaning of the term Nature, have thought fit to substitute *beauty* in it's stead, as the immediate object of the great style of art. But beauty being a word to the full as indefinite, if not as complex, as the word nature, we shall not be surprised to find that many painters of no mean abilities have been led into very fatal mistakes from erroneous and inadequate conceptions of it's meaning: we shall not be surprised at the *namby pamby* style of many of the works of Albano; we can hence account for the *manner* and affectation of Guido, who, understanding the term in too confined a sense, thought he was of course to paint, on every occasion, the handsomest woman possible; and taking accordingly, in *his* opinion, the most beautiful antique statue for his model, he constantly repeated in his works the same face, without variation of expression or character, whatever was the subject, situation, or action represented; whether a Venus or a milkmaid, the Assumption of the Virgin, the Death of Cleopatra, or Judith cutting off the head of Holofernes. This principle has also evidently been the great stumbling-block of the whole French school, to which it owes the larger share of it's absurdity and insipidity, it's consumptive languor, and it's coquettish affectation.

I will not undertake the perilous task of defining the word *beauty*; but I have no hesitation in asserting that

when beauty is said to be the proper end of art, it must not be understood as confining the choice to one set of objects, or as breaking down the boundaries and destroying the natural classes, orders, and divisions of things (which cannot be too carefully kept entire and distinct); but as meaning the perfection of each subject in it's kind, in regard to form, colour, and all it's other associated and consistent attributes. In this qualified and, I will venture to say, proper acceptation of the word in regard to art, it may be applied to nearly all things most excellent in their different ways. Thus we have various modes of beauty in the statues of the Venus, the Juno, the Niobe, the Antinous, and the Apollo;—and thus we may speak, without exciting a confusion of ideas, of a beautiful peasant, as well as of a beautiful princess, of a beautiful child, or a beautiful old man; of a beautiful cottage, a beautiful church, a beautiful palace, or even of a beautiful ruin.

The discovery or conception of this great and perfect idea of *things*, of nature in it's purest and most essential form, unimpaired by disease, unmutilated by accident, and unsophisticated by local habits and temporary fashions, and the exemplification of it in practice, by getting above individual imitation, rising from the species to the genus; and uniting, in every subject, all the perfection of which it is capable in it's kind, is the highest and ultimate exertion of human genius.—Hitherto shalt thou go, and no

further—every step in every direction from this pole of truth is alike retrograde—for, to generalize beyond the boundaries of character, to compose figures of no specific age, sex, or destination, with no predominant quality or particular end to be answered in their construction, is to violate propriety, destroy interest, and lose the very essence of beauty in contemptible nothingness and insipidity.

Conceptions of beauty or perfection take place involuntarily in the mind, through the medium of that wonderful and powerful principle, the association of ideas: but they will be very far from distinct or correct, unless we also employ much study of the laws of nature, investigate closely her methods of attaining her purposes, observe accurately her rules of proportion, and how they are varied in every department of character, develop the connexion of mind with matter, trace their reciprocal effects on each other, and learn, in all cases, to distinguish the harmonious, consistent, and energetic, from the absurd, superfluous, and inefficient combinations of parts and principles.

As the most fashionable and approved metaphysicians of the present day seem inclined to deny the existence of general ideas, I shall not contend for the propriety of applying that term to ideas formed on the principles I have been mentioning; but under whatever denomination they may be classed, it cannot be denied that they are

the true and genuine object of the highest style of painting. Poetry, though unlimited in it's field of description, and omnipotent as the vehicle of relation and sentiment, is capable of giving but faint sketches of form, colour, and whatsoever else is more immediately addressed to the sight; and the Drama, however impassioned and interesting, can only exhibit form and motion as they actually exist: but the utmost conceivable perfection of form, of majesty of character, and of graceful and energetic action, have no physical existence; they are born, bred, and reside in the human imagination only, never to be drawn from thence but by the hand of the consummate artist, working on the sublimest principles of his art. Here it may be necessary to notice that the term *ideal*, like those of nature and beauty, has probably been the source of very great and grievous errors. Instances have occurred of some, who have even been so absurd as to think colouring, *chiaro scuro*, and all that contributes to illusion in painting, as beneath their attention; who, because they have heard that nature might be improved upon in some particulars, have fondly imagined that their compositions approached the heroic and poetical in proportion as they receded from nature and became muddy, tame, and monotonous in the effect; forgetting that the ideal has reference to the forms, character, choice and congruity only of things, and not at all to the rendering the appearance of



them with truth, vivacity, and energy to the eye; in which art is so far from being capable of excelling nature, that, with her best efforts, she must ever remain at an immeasurable distance behind.

How colouring and effect may and ought to be managed, to enliven form and invigorate sentiment and expression, I can readily comprehend and, I hope, demonstrate; but wherein these different classes of excellence are incompatible with each other I could never conceive: not will the barren coldness of David, the brick-dust of the learned Poussin, nor even the dryness of Raffaele himself, ever lead me to believe that the flesh of heroes is less like flesh than that of other men; or that the surest way to strike the imagination, and interest the feelings, is to fatigue, perplex, and disgust, the organ through which the impression is made on the mind.

Let it therefore be always understood that the end of painting, in it's highest style, is twofold: first, the giving effect, illusion, or the true appearance of objects to the eye; and, secondly, the combination of this with the ideal, or the conception of them in their utmost perfection, and under such an arrangement as is calculated to make the greatest possible impression on the spectator.

With such purposes in view, consisting of such a multiplicity of parts, and requiring such an uncommon assemblage of powers, mechanical and mental, of hand, of eye,

of knowledge, of judgment, of imagination, and of indefatigable perseverance in study and practice, to enable a man to perform any one part with tolerable success, it can be no wonder that the art has not as yet, in modern times at least, reached the desired perfection; nor ought we to be surprised to find even the most celebrated masters materially defective in some one or more of its branches,—those who possessed invention, having been frequently deficient in execution; those who studied colouring, having often neglected drawing; and those who attended to form and character, having been too apt to disregard composition, and the proper management of light and shadow. The whole together, indeed, seems almost too great for the grasp of human powers, unless excited, expanded and invigorated, by such enthusiastic and continued encouragement as that which exclusively marks the bright æra of Græcian taste.

Impressed as I am at the present moment with a full conviction of the difficulties attendant on the practice of painting, I cannot but feel it also my duty to caution every one who hears me, against entering into it from improper motives, and with inadequate views of the subject; as they will, thereby, only run a risk of entailing misery and disgrace on themselves and their connexions during the rest of their lives. Should any student therefore happen

to be present, who has taken up the art on the supposition of finding it an easy and amusing employment—any one who has been sent into the Academy by his friends, on the idea that he may cheaply acquire an honourable and profitable profession—any one who has mistaken a petty kind of imitative, monkey talent for genius—any one who hopes by it to get rid of what he thinks a more vulgar or disagreeable situation, to escape confinement at the counter or the desk—any one urged merely by vanity or interest,—or, in short, impelled by any consideration but a real and unconquerable passion for excellence;—let him drop it at once, and avoid these walls and every thing connected with them as he would the pestilence; for if he have not this unquenchable liking, in addition to all the requisites above enumerated, he may pine in indigence, or skulk through life as a hackney likeness-taker, a copier, a drawing-master or pattern-drawer to young ladies, or he may turn picture-cleaner, and help Time to destroy excellencies which he cannot rival—but he must never hope to be, in the proper sense of the word, a painter.

Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to excellence, and few there be that find it. True as this undoubtedly is in all cases, in no instance will it be found so applicable as the present; for in no profession will the

student have so many difficulties to encounter—in no profession so many sacrifices to make—in no profession will he have to labour so hard, and study so intensely—and in no profession is the reward of his talents so precarious and uncertain,—as is lamentably proved by every day's experience, and by every page of history.

Let me not be told that, by such assertions, I am raising obstacles and throwing obstructions in the paths of men of genius, for to *such* obstacles act as a stimulus; what quenches others gives them fire; and I am confident a knowledge of the truth will in the end equally benefit the art and the artist. Should any one be discouraged by it, I will say to him, I have rendered you an essential service; you will soon find some other situation better suited to your talents. But to those who can, undismayed, look all the difficulties in the face; who have made up their minds to conquer; who are ready to sacrifice their time, their ease, their pleasure, their profit, and devote themselves, soul and body, to the art,—in short, who cannot be restrained from the pursuit of it; to those I will say, You alone are *worthy*, you alone are *likely* to succeed: You give the strongest proofs that can be obtained, of possessing all the necessary requisites, and there is every probability that you will do honour to your art, your country, and yourselves; for nothing is denied to persevering and well-directed industry.

I wish we could see—I wish we could ever hope to see—the time when all external obstacles to the progress of art were removed; but as to the internal difficulties, however they may fret us, I am afraid we must, and ought to, consider them as our very best friends. They put me in mind of an anecdote of two highwaymen, which, as it is short, I shall take the liberty of introducing:—“Two highwaymen (says a certain author) passing once by a gibbet, one of them, with an ill-boding sigh, exclaimed, ‘What a fine profession ours would be, if there were no gibbets!’ ‘O, you blockhead,’ says the other, ‘how much you are mistaken!—Gibbets are the making of us; for, if there had been no gibbets, every one would be a highwayman.’” Just so it is in art: difficulties serve to keep out unqualified and unworthy competitors; if there were no difficulties, every one would be a painter.

Of the several branches or divisions of the art, separately considered, design or drawing is undoubtedly the most important; for on drawing, not only form, but action, expression, character, beauty, grace, and greatness, chiefly depend. Colour represents nothing, and lights and shadows have no meaning, till they are circumscribed by form. Drawing is therefore evidently the foundation and first element of the art, without which all the others, ideal or practical, are not merely useless, but non-entities.

Hence it is clear that drawing must have existed before any other branch of painting, and that drawing must still have precedence in the order of acquirement; and hence we can be at no loss to account for the enthusiasm with which it has been spoken of, nor for the zeal with which the study of it has been enforced by all teachers of the art. "He," says Sir Joshua Reynolds, "that is capable of delineating fine forms, even if he can do nothing more, is a great artist." And Annibale Carracci was wont to say to his scholars, "First make a good outline, and then (whatever you do in the middle) it must be a good picture."

Many more expressions to the same effect, and of equal authority, might be quoted, but we have yet another proof infinitely superior to the opinion of any individual, however exalted, of the supreme necessity and comprehensive utility of drawing; for, in all the various schools and academies that have been instituted, in every place and country in which painting has obtained a local habitation, what has been invariably their object? Has it not been design alone? How little, if any, has been the attention bestowed on other branches of the art? If you ask them, 'What is the first requisite in a painter?' will they not say, Drawing? 'What the second?'—Drawing—'What the third?'—Drawing. They tell you indeed to acquire colour-

ing, chiaro scuro, and composition, *if you can*; but they *insist* on your becoming draughtsmen. After this, to doubt the importance of drawing, would be as absurd and arrogant as to doubt whether the institution of academies have in any degree contributed to the advancement of painting.

Were I to give an opinion on the prevailing practice of academies, I should say, not that too much attention has been bestowed on drawing, but that certainly too little has been paid to other branches of the art. A man, who has obtained a considerable proficiency in one part, will not like to become a child in another; he will rather pretend to despise and neglect, than be thought incapable, or take the pains necessary, to conquer it; and therefore it is, that, though the student must necessarily commence with drawing, he should also very soon begin to attempt chiaro scuro, colouring, and composition, and thus carry on the whole together, if he wishes to become a complete artist.

Good drawing, in the most confined acceptation of the term, demands at least two qualities, correctness and spirit; that is, the forms and quantities should be just, and rendered with precision and facility, which, simple as it may appear, not only requires an accurate eye and a skilful hand,—the result of incessant practice,—but *these* must also be accompanied by a clear understanding of

the construction and mechanism of the subject attempted, for (as invariable experience proves) he that is unacquainted with the shapes and structure of the bones and joints which support and govern the animal frame, and knows not how the muscles (the moving powers) are arranged, fixed, and connected, and their modes of action, can make little or nothing of the continually varying appearance of them through their integuments, and the most successful endeavour at representing them would necessarily include as many blunders, as the translation of a book of science by a person who understood the language only, and was totally ignorant of the subject of it.

We cannot, as I have heard a great man express himself on another occasion, *see at sight*. A tolerably correct understanding of the construction and leading principles of an object, is requisite even to the seeing it properly ; and the weight of the obligation on a painter to study anatomy will appear to increase in a tenfold ratio, when we likewise take into the consideration, how seldom it happens that nothing more is required of him than to represent his objects standing still, or lying in a motionless or languid position before him ; for, if, in such cases, the eye alone be insufficient to enable him to render them correctly, how much more so must it prove, in regard to figures enlivened by sentiment, or agitated by contending passions, and thrown into *sudden, animated, and momentary* action, in which a



living model (if capable of being placed at all) can hold but for an instant, and must quickly sink into quiescent torpidity! Here it is certain, that, if the artist possess not a thorough knowledge of the figure, if he understand not correctly the arrangement and play of all its different parts, their various and mutual dependencies on each other, and the appearances they must naturally assume in every given position,—if, at the same time, he be not equally familiar with the rules of proportion, ponderation, and the just division and balance of motion, in every joint and limb, he will find it impossible to “catch the Cynthia of the minute;” his labour will be vain; his living model, far from proving an useful pattern, will rather tend to lead him astray, and his (under such circumstances) presumptuous attempt at drawing must inevitably be deficient in precision, correctness, energy and grace.

The uses of anatomical knowledge being so obvious, I shall only remark, in addition, that, as it has generally been too much neglected, so it has sometimes also been pursued too far. There are those who have suffered it to usurp the first place, and considered it as the end, instead of the means. Let the student be on his guard against this mistake; for, though by inflating the muscles, ploughing up the interstices between them in every direction, pushing the bones through the skin, or flaying his figures completely, he may *possibly* show himself an able anatomist,

he will infallibly prove himself a bad painter. Let him remember that the bones and muscles are always covered by their integuments, and that they are more or less visible, square or round, soft or firm, divided or united into masses, according to the age, sex, occupation, situation, circumstances, and character of the subject, the expression of which with force, precision and fidelity, is always to be regarded as the principal end of drawing.

The study of anatomy, as I have before hinted, must necessarily be accompanied by that of proportion and symmetry; for what will the most intimate knowledge of the different parts of the human body, and their several functions, avail us, if we are, at the same time, ignorant of their relative lengths, sizes, and thickness in regard to each other and to the whole together, on which, and on the regulation of the precise degrees of meagreness, muscularity, softness, firmness, elasticity, rigidity, refinement or vulgarity, which must equally pervade every part of each figure, all unity, force and discrimination of character immediately depends.

General notions of proportion may undoubtedly be acquired with the greatest certainty and facility by a careful and persevering study of the antique, but they can be matured and completed only by referring to Nature, the fountain-head or mine, from whence all those surprising,

and since that time incomprehensible, treasures of excellence must have been derived.

In nature, the elements and leading features of the animal œconomy are few; and the astonishing variety by which it is distinguished, appears to consist chiefly in the forms, quantities, and relative proportions of the parts. *Every* class of animals, and every individual of every class, is variously endowed with appropriate degrees of bulk, strength, and elasticity of body, and of energy, sagacity and comprehension of mind, according to it's destination; and every combination of these, or other, qualities, is inseparably connected with a particular set of proportions and configuration of parts, at once descriptive of the qualities united, and conducive to the end proposed by their union. Thus the combined qualities, and the combined proportions, are always reciprocally the exponents of each other. Hence, by viewing the form only of an animal, we are enabled to predict its qualities, whether it be strong or subtle, active or slothful, courageous or timid; and hence it also follows, that the true expression of character in painting depends on the proper conformation and adjustment of the parts to the whole and to each other, according to the unalterable and universally established laws of Nature.

Of these laws, or latent principles, of form, now so

little understood, the ancients, by long study and laborious experiment, made themselves completely masters. They saw what particular proportions marked the physical powers; they understood what denoted the moral; they observed how the situation and shape of the head varied with the increase or decrease of intellectual vigour and comprehension, and, by skilfully applying their knowledge to practice, by judiciously exaggerating (in some cases) the peculiar distinctions of man, compared with the inferior classes of animals, by suiting the proportions to the qualities intended to be expressed, and by avoiding the mixture of any thing incongruous or unnecessary, they produced those concentrated, dephlegmated and *highly rectified* personifications of strength, activity, beauty, majesty, wisdom, and enthusiasm, which astonish and enchant us, under the names of the Hercules Farnese, the Venus, the fighting Gladiator, the Jupiter, and the Apollo.

The works of the ancients can never be studied too much, but they may easily be studied improperly: the prime object, which ought always to be kept in view, as the only means by which we can ever hope to rival them, is the re-discovery, in it's fullest extent, of the principle on which they were formed, which none of the moderns have yet comprehended, nor probably attempted, scarcely suspecting it's existence: the best of them have, in general, contented themselves with selecting some favourite figure,

and using it on all occasions indiscriminately as a rule of proportion, absurdly forgetting that, if it was exactly proper in any one instance, it must necessarily be more or less improper in all others. Thus, in escaping the meanness and vulgarity of common nature, they confounded all distinction of character, and became incurable mannerists, insipid or extravagant, according to their choice of a model.

Nor is this the only evil to be dreaded and guarded against in the imitation of the antique statues: for though, as Rubens justly observes, we can never consider them too attentively, or study them too closely; though, in order to attain perfection in painting, it is necessary to understand them, nay, to be so thoroughly possessed of this knowledge, that it may diffuse itself every where, (for in this degenerate age we can produce nothing like them,) yet it is no less certain that ignorant painters and beginners, who make no distinction betwixt the figure and the stone, the form and the material of which it is composed, often learn from them somewhat that is stiff, crude, *liney*, and harsh in respect to anatomy; by which, while they take themselves to be good proficient, they do but disgrace Nature instead of ennobling her, losing all her warmth and feeling, and giving us marble tinged with various colours in the place of flesh.—In sculpture, it must be remembered that, without any fault in the work or the

workman, many outlines and shadows appear hard, dense, and opaque, which in nature are softened and harmonised by the colour and transparency of the flesh, skin, and cartilages, and that the lights also are extremely different from the natural, the hardness and polish of the material giving them a lustre and sharpness, which dazzles the eye, and raises the surface beyond the proper pitch.

The truth of these observations is too obvious to need a comment, but the whole force of them can hardly be felt by those, who have not lately had an opportunity of viewing the works of the French school, in which, at present, the mischievous effects of an inordinate rage for copying the antique, are too notorious for any thing but the blindest prejudice to overlook or tolerate. It seems, indeed, to be the fate of this school to be ever in extremes. Formerly they were tawdry coxcombs; now they affect to be the plainest quakers in art:—formerly they absurdly endeavoured to invest sculpture in all the rich ornaments of painting; now they are for shearing painting of her own appropriate beams, and reducing her to the hard and dry monotony of sculpture:—formerly their figures were obscured by splendid colours, buried under huge masses of gorgeous drapery flying in all directions, and lost amid columns, arcades, and all kinds of pompous and misplaced magnificence; now they glue their draperies to the figure, paste the hair to the head in all the

lumpish opacity of coloured plaster; nail their figures to a hard unbroken ground, and, avoiding every thing like effect and picturesque composition, often place them in a tedious row from end to end of the picture, as nearly like an antique bas-relief as possible. In short, it seems to be the principal aim of a French artist to rival Medusa's head, and turn every thing into stone; and so far it must be confessed, to their credit, that, however they may have failed to equal the beauties of the antique, they have certainly copied, nay even improved on, it's defects with uncommon success.

When I say the defects of the antique, I mean in regard to painting only, for in sculpture I consider them as beauties. The ancients understood exactly what each art could, and what it could not, perform, and wisely confined themselves, in the latter art, to the display of elegance and precision of form, just discrimination of character, and forcible expression of passion; but, in painting, I have no doubt that these were combined with many other excellencies:—for to suppose, as the French evidently do, that they followed precisely the same practice, that they did not attempt to give more lightness, fulness, richness and freedom to their hair and draperies; that they forbore to avail themselves of the powers of colour, and the artifices of contrast, to give depth, distance, and effect to their compositions, which however impracticable,

and therefore absurd, in sculpture, are completely within the province, and form some of the most essential and appropriate beauties, of the sister art,—to suppose this, is to suppose them devoid of taste, and totally ignorant of the nature, extent, and powers of the art of painting.

“There is,” says Dryden, “no short cut or royal road to the sciences.” This remark will equally apply to drawing, which must be acquired by assiduous study and practice, and cannot be bought for money, nor taught by precept merely. I have pointed out some of the leading requisites and difficulties, and shown, in part, the way to eminence; but on your own energies you must at last rely for the attainment of it. I shall therefore finish my observations on this head, by repeating what cannot be too often repeated, too strongly impressed on your minds, nor too firmly fixed in your memory, that drawing is the only sure and stable foundation of the art, the only step by which you can ascend into the highest seats in the temple of Fame. By other excellencies you may, for a while, charm the senses, but drawing is almost the only weapon, by which you can reach the understanding and touch the heart; it is the only instrument, by which you can demonstrate elegance and beauty, develop character, and unlock the hidden recesses of passion. All other acquirements derive from it irresistible force and beauty; but



unsupported and unassisted by correct, masterly, and scientific drawing, they can, at best, reach but a second rate and temporary celebrity: when the tide of taste rises, and the winds of criticism bluster and beat upon it, the showy but ill-founded edifice must quickly be swept away, or swallowed up and forgotten for ever.

These remarks are the more necessary, as it must be confessed that the strength of the English painters never lay so much as it ought in design; and now, perhaps, more than ever, they seem devoted to the charms of colour and effect, and captivated by the mere penmanship of the art, the empty legerdemain of pencil.

But if the English artist runs counter, in this instance, to the established character of his country, and prefers the superficial to the solid attainments in art, has he not many excuses? may it not, in a great measure, be attributed to the general frivolity and meanness of the subjects he is called upon to treat? to the inordinate rage for portrait painting (a more respectable kind of caricature), by which he is condemned for ever to study and copy the wretched defects, and conform to the still more wretched prejudices, of every tasteless and ignorant individual, however in form, features and mind utterly hostile to all ideas of character, expression, and sentiment? And may it not, in part, be attributed to the necessity he is under, of painting always with reference to the Exhibition?

In a crowd, he that talks loudest, not he that talks best, is surest of commanding attention; and in an Exhibition, he that does not attract the eye, does nothing. But however plausible these excuses, it becomes the true painter to consider, that they will avail nothing before the tribunal of the world and posterity. Keeping the true end of art in view, he must rise superior to the prejudices, disregard the applause, and contemn the censure, of corrupt and incompetent judges; far from aiming at being fashionable, it must be his object to reform, and not to flatter,—to teach, and not to please,—if he aspires, like Zeuxis, to paint for eternity.

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IN taking a retrospective view of the progress of the art in modern times, it will be seen, that the two first schools, both in rank and time, made design, and it's dependent excellencies, their chief objects of study; which was no more than might have been expected, as design (I have already shown) must necessarily be attended to, in some degree, antecedently to any other branch of the art. But the artists of these schools had another, and a much more powerful, motive to urge them to the almost exclusive cultivation of this principal root and stem of

painting: they had the exquisite remains of ancient sculpture to contemplate: these began from a very early period to attract general admiration: from these the first germs of correct taste were scattered among the people of Italy; by these their artists had their eyes first opened, and their minds first impregnated with ideas of true beauty; by these they first acquired elevated and just conceptions of nature, and were taught to look beyond the imitation of individual models for perfection of form, for graceful action, and for purity and grandeur of character.

But though both these schools made design a primary object, they differed essentially in regard to style, and in the manner of its application. Severity, energy and loftiness bordering on extravagance, characterize the principal works of the Florentines. Their style of design approaches the gigantic; it abounds with abrupt transitions and violent contrasts, and affects an expression of strength and fierceness, by which grace is but too often excluded, and propriety violated. Taught by the ancients to soar above common nature, they often mistook what was only uncommon and far-fetched, for the great and the extraordinary, and failed to interest, from too ardent a desire to surprise.

To their credit, however, it must be remembered, that modern painting owes them infinite obligation; they first

burst the trammels of dryness, meagreness, hardness, and servile imitation; first introduced the free, bold, and flowing outline; gave the first examples of dignified character, energetic action, and concentrated expression; invented *chiaro scuro* and grouping; and often imparted to their works a majesty unrivalled by any subsequent productions of art. On the whole, satisfied with commanding admiration, the Tuscan artists may be said to have considered the task of pleasing as beneath their notice.

The school of Florence, independent of its merits, has an indisputable title to the veneration of all lovers of the arts, as the first in Italy which cultivated them. Painting, which had languished and become nearly extinct with the Roman Empire, was revived by Giovanni Cimabue, born of a noble family at Florence, about the year 1240. His works, as may easily be imagined, were in a very ordinary, not to say wretched, style; but, if they had not excited the admiration, and received the applause, of his countrymen, Florence in all probability would never have been honoured with such a painter as Michael Angelo Buonaroti.

It would be as tedious as useless to recount the stammering and babbling of the art in its infant state. I shall therefore pass on to about 150 years after the death of Cimabue, when the dawning of an enlarged and liberal style of design began to appear at Florence; when

Massaccio, whose works are still in existence, produced figures which Raphael, in the zenith of his reputation, did not disdain to transplant into some of his most celebrated compositions; when the intricacies and difficulties of fore-shortening began in some measure to be understood and subdued; when colouring and composition were attempted by Andrea Verocchio, Andrea Mantegna, and Luca Signorelli of Cortona; and when, in short, all circumstances seemed to concur to usher in, with becoming splendour, Leonardo da Vinci, one of the first luminaries of modern art, and one of the most extraordinary of men.

If it be true that "one science only will one genius fit," what shall we say to the man, who, master of all mental and all bodily perfections, equally excelled in painting, poetry, sculpture, architecture, chemistry, anatomy, mathematics, and philosophy; who renders credible all that has been related of the admirable Creighton, who attempted every thing and succeeded in every attempt; who, sailing round the world of art and science, touched at every port and brought home something of value from each?

This was the glory of Leonardo, and this was also his weakness; for, equally in love with grandeur and littleness, beauty and deformity, character and caricature, he bestowed his attention on them all by turns, and soared or dived, as the caprice of the moment directed. His

genius, however, gave the death blow to flatness and insipidity, by the invention of that deep tone of colour, strength of shadow, and bold relieve, which, afterwards carried to perfection, enchants us in the dreams of Correggio, and electrifies us in the mysterious visions of Rembrandt.

Less profoundly learned in design, less lofty and comprehensive in conception than his great rival and contemporary M. Angelo, his celebrated cartoon of the horsemen contending for a standard is, nevertheless, one of the noblest inventions in the whole circle of modern art; it evinces a singular boldness and fertility of imagination, by the display of every attitude of the human body on horseback, in the various actions of striking, pulling, thrusting, warding, and evading a blow, combined with a felicity and energy, at once picturesque, interesting and surprising: the whole is animated, every part is in motion, and we witness, by turns, the collected coolness of true courage, the devouring malevolence of rage, the contending emotions of hope and fear, the exultation of assured victory, and the despairing gasp of inevitable death. The horses, conceived with the fire of a true poet, and executed with the science of an anatomist, rear and plunge into the battle with a fury equal to that of their riders: in short, this composition was altogether unexampled at the time, and unrivalled for ages after, till it suggested to Rubens the first hint for those magnificent groups of horses and

figures, in his battles of the Amazons, and of Constantine and Maxentius; and for those astonishing masses of men and animals in commotion, his huntings of the lion, the tiger, the crocodile and the hippopotamus.

There is no possibility of calculating what such a man as Leonardo da Vinci may have lost by his versatility and want of perseverance. With such comprehension, and such invention, he might, doubtless, instead of furnishing hints, and pointing out the promised land to others, have taken possession of it himself, and carried the principles of *chiaro scuro* and grouping to perfection. As it is, his works are comparatively of little value, the greater part of them (the celebrated *Last Supper* at Milan included) having been left in an imperfect state.

Of numerous volumes, written by him on arts and science, *one only, a treatise on painting*, is at present in circulation; and by this alone, were there *no other* proofs, might the extraordinary extent of his capacity, and the eagerness of his research, be justly estimated; for though confused and unconnected, in some parts obscure and in others trifling, it is nevertheless one of the best elementary works on the art, extant.

Whatever escaped the sagacity, or lay beyond the powers, of L. da Vinci was accomplished by his mighty competitor M. Angelo Buonaroti, the glory of the Florentine school; who elevated design to a pitch of excellence,

from which it has ever since been declining. The genius of this great man operated an entire change of principle in modern art: to the little and meagre he gave grandeur and amplitude; to the confused and uninteresting he gave simplicity and effect; and on the feeble and unmeaning he stamped energy and character. Raffaello, his greatest contemporary and rival, thanked God for having been born in an age which boasted of such a man; and Reynolds, the greatest painter and critic of our times, prides himself on the capability of feeling his excellence, and declares, that the slightest of his perfections ought to confer glory and distinction enough to satisfy an ambitious man.

Michael Angelo, as we are informed by Ascanio Condivi, having observed the great deficiency of Albert Durer's rules for drawing, resolved to write a complete treatise on the anatomy and proportions of the human figure, and to compose a theory founded on the knowledge and experience acquired by his long practice, for the benefit of all *future artists*.

That this resolution was never carried into effect, must ever be regretted, as an incalculable and irreparable loss to the arts; for certainly never man before or since (at least in modern times) was so perfectly qualified for the task. Anatomy, it is true, has, in a medical and physiological point of view, been subsequently much advanced,



but the writers on the subject have, in general, been little able or solicitous to speak of the human figure in regard to proportion, beauty, character, action and attitude, branches of the science the most interesting to an artist, the most difficult to investigate, and which, we may naturally conclude, would have occupied the larger share of a work composed by a professed painter.

Destitute of the assistance of this intended treatise, the knowledge of his principles can now be gleaned only by the accurate observation and diligent comparison of his works with those of others; for, in this particular, the accounts of his life, though copious enough in some respects, can help us but little. One circumstance however we learn from them, which I would wish to press forcibly on the attention of *all* my hearers, that he was indefatigable in his practice, and in the study both of nature and the works of the ancients, and that this was continued through his whole life, even to extreme old age: the poorest of men, as he observed of himself, did not labour from necessity more than he did from choice: indeed, from all that is related of him, he appears not to have had the smallest conception that his art was to be acquired by any other means than incessant and unwearied diligence, though, as Sir Joshua Reynolds justly remarks, he, of all men that ever lived, might have advanced the strongest pretensions to the efficacy of genius and inspiration.

Let no one therefore overlook this salutary lesson, let no one henceforward presume to grudge his pains, or think the art of cheap and easy acquirement! I cannot quite agree with our revered and excellent painter, that nothing but labour is necessary to attain perfection, but of this I am quite certain, that, without labour, all other requisites will be vain and fruitless.

The principal work of Michael Angelo, in our art, consists of a series of pictures painted on the cieling, and part of the walls, of the Pope's chapel, commonly called the Capella Sistina. The subjects, (taken from the sacred records,) beginning with the Creation, and ending with the Last Judgement, seem to have been chosen for the purpose of exhibiting the history of man, as he stands in relation to the Creator, and of shewing his origin, progress, and the final dispensations of Providence respecting him. Of the magnificence of this plan, as you have lately heard it explained with unparalleled ingenuity and inimitable eloquence, in a way, in short, that sets the commentator on a level with his author\*, I shall say nothing, but shall confine my observations to the peculiar style, which distinguishes the works in general, and *this* in particular, of Michael Angelo.

\* Mr. Opie here refers again to his immediate predecessor in the professorship of painting. E.

In the first place it is obvious, that he avoids, on all occasions, a multiplicity of objects, and a multiplicity of parts. He knew, as a great critic has judiciously remarked, that, in poetry and painting, many little things do not make a great one; and he has, therefore, rejected all unnecessary subdivisions and unessential particularities: hence the bold swell and flow of his line, uninterrupted by useless breaks and petty inflections; hence the unencumbered breadth of his surfaces, on which the eye rests unfatigued and unperplexed by impertinent differences and trivial distinctions; and hence the fewness and largeness of the parts, both in respect to his figures and his compositions, at once so simple and so impressive.

The same method obtains with him in the intellectual as in the practical parts of the art. In his manner of conceiving his subject, and telling his story, he equally avoids all petty and common-place details of circumstances, ingenious artifices, unimportant shades of character, and merely curious varieties of expression, which arrest and distract the attention of the spectator, and weaken the force of the general effect: *essence*, not individuality—*sentiment*, not incident—*man*, not men, are his objects; and, like the Satan and Death of Milton, he meditates no second stroke, but hastens by one sure blow to effect his purpose.

As his profound knowledge of the human figure taught him what to reject, so it likewise taught and enabled him

to mark the essential forms with unexampled force and precision: possessed himself, he instantly possesses the spectator, with the complete idea of his object. As in the drawing of his figures there is more knowledge and precision, so in their actions and attitudes there is more vigour and unity, than is seen in those of any other modern painter. By this is meant, that the situation and turn of every limb is more correspondent with the whole, is more perfectly informed with the same mind, and more exactly bears its part in the general feeling; and hence it is, that, though Raffaele often exceeds him in the variety of his characters, the particular expressions of passion, and what may be called the dramatic effect of his pictures, yet, in giving the appearance of thought, capacity and dignity, he is altogether unrivalled and unapproached.

This perfect unity or concurrence of every feature, joint and limb, in the same feeling, united to the breadth and boldness of his style of drawing, is what constitutes the intellectual energy of his figures, and gives them that air of inspiration, and of belonging to a higher species of beings, which Sir J. Reynolds notices with such admiration. Rapt and absorbed themselves, they instantly communicate the same sensations to the beholder, who, awe-struck, whilst he gazes on them, dares not think them on a level and of the same rank with himself.

Such is his figure of the Creator, borne aloft on clouds,

dividing light from darkness; such when, descending on attendant spirits, he imparts the electric spark of vitality and immortality to the newly-formed Adam, or with a word calls forth the adoring Eve from the side of her sleeping mate; such are the majestic forms of the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Joel; and such, though wild and haggard, the female form of the Cumæan Sibyl, and many others, if not all, of that sublime and inimitable circle: all of them, more or less, in louder or lower tones, proclaim, "The imagination that conceived, and the hand that formed us, were divine."

These are some of the principal features of the style of Michael Angelo; a style, in which knowledge, energy, and simplicity, bear equal parts; which unravels perplexity, gives the appearance of ease to difficulty, and imparts dignity and sentiment to every object it embraces. Though the sublime, in painting and poetry, so overpowers and takes such absolute possession of the whole mind, that, whilst the work is before us, no room is left for the ungracious and ungrateful task of criticism, yet, in cooler moments, it cannot, it must not be denied, that Michael Angelo had derelictions and deficiencies too great to be overlooked, and too dangerous to be excused; that he was sometimes capricious and extravagant in his inventions, and generally too ostentatious of his anatomical knowledge; that he wanted the vigorous tone of colour, and force of *chiaro*

*scuro*, necessary to complete the effect of his design ; and that, from aiming always to be great, he often violated propriety, neglected the proper discrimination of character, and not seldom pushed it into monotony and bombast.

I know it has been pleaded in mitigation, that great painters, like great poets,

“ sometimes gloriously offend,  
And rise to faults true critics dare not mend ;”

that his errors flowed from the same source as his beauties, were often such as none but himself was ever capable of committing, and such as could never have occurred to a mean or vulgar mind. But I hold it not safe to admit of apologies of this nature, and more particularly in the present case ; for errors are errors, from whatever source they spring, and are never so likely to be pernicious as when associated with splendid and overpowering excellence.

It being the nature even of the faults of M. Angelo to confer a kind, though a false kind, of dignity, too much caution and circumspection cannot be used in the study of his works. The ill success of his immediate and exclusive imitators proves that it is not safe for every man to attempt to draw the bow of Ulysses, or wield the club of Hercules. Let not the student hope, by distorting the limbs, exaggerating the action of the muscles, or by purloining, here and there, a figure from his compositions, to

become an imitator, though he may become a *caricaturist*, of Michael Angelo: but let him first make himself master of his science and principles, let him carefully separate his errors from his excellence; and then, if he possess his boundless imagination, he will probably succeed better than Vasari, Bronzino, Hemskirk, Coxis, Goltzius, Spranger, and a herd of others, who mistook bombast for grandeur, distortion for grace, and phrensied convulsion for energy.....Superficial and clumsy mannerists! the style of Michael Angelo, to them, was only the lion's skin on the ass's back, which, instead of rendering him terrible, only exposed him to blows, ridicule, and contempt.

Such was not Raffaello Sanzio, the founder of the Roman school, the master of passion,—the painter of human nature.

The genius of Raffaello was not of that phosphoric kind, that blazes out of itself without foreign help: his manner, at the commencement of his career, was dry, minute, and hard to excess; precisely like that of his master Pietro Perugino, in whose footsteps he appeared, for a time, to be going on, without a conception of his own powers, or those of the art, and without imbibing a ray of inspiration from the miraculous remains of the ancients, by which he was surrounded, or transferring an atom of their grandeur of style into his own works. A visit to Florence, however, soon enabled him to leave his master at a

humble distance. Seizing every opportunity of improvement, as he rolled on, he increased every moment in size and splendour; he mended his style of design, improved his colouring, and acquired composition. But it was not till after he had been clandestinely introduced to the sight of Michael Angelo's works in the Capella Sistina, that he completely freed himself from the defects of his first manner. Astonished by those gigantic forms, which seemed to look down with contempt on his littleness, and to say with a warning voice "Go thou and do likewise," he instantly went home, as we are told by Vasari, and, obliterating entirely the work he was then employed on, he re-designed and re-painted the whole in a style of greatness unknown to any of his former productions.

Of these figures, a Prophet and Sibyls, which he endeavoured to conceive in the grand gusto, it is nevertheless remarkable, that, in wanting the science and precision, they also fail in a great degree of the sublime and energetic character of those in the Sistine Chapel. The correct judgement of Raffaello soon advised him of this defect, and, conscious of his worth as well as of his weakness, he no longer laboured to become another Michael Angelo, but studied him properly in conjunction with nature and the works of the ancients, taking as much of each as best corresponded with his own powers. Henceforward, there-



fore, his style of design became original and truly his own; not the vehicle of those awe-creating and terrific energies, conceived only by M. Angelo, nor of the more exquisite beauty and elevated refinement of the antique, but the medium of natural forms, well chosen, indeed, and united to an invention, expression, grace and propriety, such as, in an equal degree, never before or since fell to the lot of one man.

But, however great and various his powers, his peculiar strength, that in which he has never yet been rivalled and never can be surpassed, was **EXPRESSION**. To this all his efforts tended; for this he invented, drew and composed, and exhausted nature in the choice of subjects to display it: every effect of mind on matter, every affection of the human soul, as exhibited in the countenance, from the gentlest emotion to the utmost fury and whirlwind of contending passions, from the demoniac phrensy of the possessed boy in the Transfiguration, to the melting rapture of the Virgin Mother contemplating her divine offspring, may be found so faithfully and energetically represented on his canvass, that we not only see, but feel, and are by irresistible sympathy made partakers of his well-imaged joys and sorrows: by this he attracts every eye, warms every heart, and sways it to the mood of what he likes or loathes: this is what has made him, if not the greatest,

certainly the most interesting and the most universally admired of all modern painters, and rendered his name, in the general mouth, synonymous with perfection.

The history of no man's life affords a more encouraging and instructive example than that of Raffaele. The path, by which he ascended to eminence, is open, and the steps visible to all. He began with apparently no very uncommon fund of ability, but, sensible of his deficiencies, he lost no opportunity of repairing them. He studied all the artists of his own and the preceding times, he penetrated all their mysteries, mastered all their principles, and grafted all their separate excellencies on his own stock ; his genius, like fire, embraced and gathered strength from every object with which it came in contact, and at last burst forth in a flame, to warm, enlighten and astonish mankind.

Both Michael Angelo and Raffaele, great as they were, in design fell extremely short of the ancients ; M. Angelo, in variety, delicacy and discrimination ; and Raffaele, in elevation, refinement, and precision. The first undoubtedly stands highest, but the last is probably the more eligible and safe model for *imitation*. Grace and propriety attend him in every step of his progress, his excellencies are both more numerous, and more within the scope of general comprehension. He saw in nature what every body sees but nobody ever before so well expressed ; and no one,

till he is convinced by experience to the contrary, doubts that he should have done precisely like Raffaello. On the contrary, Michael Angelo saw nature through a medium of his own, which took away its littleness, gave it energy and amplitude, and rendered it more mysterious and imposing. The mere imitator of Raffaello, therefore, is likely to escape censure, though he may possibly deserve little praise; whilst the imitator of Michael Angelo risks every thing at once; he must succeed or fail altogether,—he must be great or contemptible.

# LECTURE II.

READ AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

*February 23, 1807.*



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**O**F all the parts of painting, practical or intellectual, the first in importance by the universal acknowledgement of all ages and nations, the quality of all others the most rare, the most beneficial, and that which bears the most unequivocal marks of its divine origin, is undoubtedly Invention. Its possessors are therefore justly considered as aspiring to the highest honours of genius, and entitled to be regarded as the Newtons, the Columbuses, and the Alexanders of painting, who have discovered new principles, increased the possessions, and extended the dominions, of art.

Unfortunately, this most inestimable quality, in which genius is thought more particularly to consist, is, of all human faculties, the least subject to reason or rule, being

derived from heaven alone according to some, attributed by others to organization, by a third class to industry, by a fourth to circumstances, by a fifth to the influence of the stars, and, in the general opinion, the gift of nature only. But, though few teach us how to improve it, and still fewer how to obtain it, all agree that nothing can be done without it. Destitute of invention, a poet is but a plagiarist, and a painter but a copier of others.

But, however true it may be that invention cannot be reduced to rule and taught by regular process, it must necessarily, like every other effect, have an adequate cause. It cannot be by chance, that excellence is produced with certainty and constancy, and, however remote and obscure its origin, thus much is certain, that observation must precede invention, and a mass of materials must be collected, before we can combine them. He therefore, who wishes to be a painter or a poet, must, like Imlac, enlarge his sphere of attention, keep his fancy ever on the wing, and *overlook no kind of knowledge*. He must range deserts and mountains for images, picture upon his mind every tree of the forest and flower of the valley, observe the crags of the rock and the pinnacles of the palace, follow the windings of the rivulet, and watch the changes of the clouds; in short, all nature, savage or civilized, animate or inanimate, the plants of the garden, the animals of the wood, the minerals of the earth, and the

/ meteors of the sky, must *undergo his examination*. To a  
 painter or poet nothing can be useless: whatever is great,  
 — whatever is beautiful, whatever is interesting, and what-  
 ever is dreadful, must be familiar to his imagination, and  
 concur to store his mind with an inexhaustible variety of  
 ideas, ready for association on every possible occasion,  
 to embellish sentiment, and give effect to truth. It is  
 moreover absolutely requisite, that *man, the epitome of all*,—  
 his principal subject and his judge, should become a par-  
 ticular object of his investigation: he must be acquainted  
 with all that is characteristic and beautiful, both in regard  
 to his mental and bodily endowments, must study their  
 analogies, and learn how far moral and physical excellence  
 are connected and dependent one on the other. He must,  
 further, observe the power of the passions in all their  
 combinations, and trace their changes, as modified by  
 constitution, or by the accidental influences of climate or  
 custom, from the sprightliness of infancy to the despon-  
 dence of decrepitude: he must be familiar with all the  
 modes of life, and, above all, endeavor to discriminate  
 the essential from the accidental, to divest himself of the  
 prejudices of his own age and country, and, disregarding  
 temporary fashions and local taste, learn to see nature  
 and beauty in the abstract, and rise to general and trans-  
 cendental truth, which will always be the same.

Nor is his labour yet at an end. To the *study* of nature



he must also join that of art, and enrich his mind by the contemplation of all the treasures produced by it in ancient and modern times, tracing its progress from its rudest infancy to its ultimate perfection; not contenting himself with a superficial survey, but studying attentively the peculiar manner of each master, dwelling on all their successful efforts, scrutinizing all their defects, observing all their beautiful thoughts; enquiring whence they were derived, with what connected, and how far founded in nature; entering into all the artifices of their compositions, and comparing their different modes of execution and arrangement, till he penetrates and develops the principles on which their most splendid effects are produced.

Thus impregnated and warmed by the contemplation of high excellence, our bosoms expand, we learn to see with other eyes than our own, and our minds, accustomed to the conceptions of the noblest and brightest intellects, are prepared, by degrees, to follow them in their loftiest flights, and rival them in their most vigorous exertions.

Here it will perhaps be remarked, that the greatest pains are often fruitless, and that we are not seldom called upon to admire the productions of native powers, unaided, unforced, unblest or unperturbed by any kind of culture or foreign assistance whatever: whence it is inferred by many, that genius is no more than a sort of instinct, by which its happy possessors are led, without effort and

without anxiety, to produce admirable works, though, at the same time, completely ignorant of the principles and causes on which such effects necessarily depend; an inference, than which, in my opinion, nothing can be more erroneous and unfounded; being convinced that it would be impossible to find one instance; wherein any high degree of excellence had been attained without great activity and exertion, and consequently considerable acquirements. The possessors of these supposed native talents had, it is true, been often denied the usual road to eminence; the gates of learning were perhaps shut to them; but we are not hastily to conclude from thence that they must have stood still: they defrauded the turnpike, and conducted their silent march another way, pursuing their journey not the less rapidly, though unaccompanied by the noise of flogging and whipping incident to travellers by the public stage. In short, whether observed or not, their time and talents must have been employed and exercised; and they profited of opportunities presented by chance; or procured by stealth, or there is no truth in the truest of all proverbs—"Out of nothing, nothing can come."

I do not, however, by what has been said, mean to assert, that the natural abilities of all men are on a par. I have allowed that equal degrees of industry and exertion will not, in all cases, produce equal effects; I only contend,

that whatever differences may exist as to original capacity, still nature must be observed, art studied, and the mind well impregnated, before any fruits of high flavour and excellence can be derived from it. Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Michael Angelo, and Raffaele, may have been cast in a finer mould, "informed with purer fire," and adapted to receive, combine, and reflect images with greater facility, vivacity and correctness, than other men; but, I cannot suppose, on different principles;—and if their works were not the result of knowledge, labour and experience, they produced them without materials, and are consequently less inventors than creators. On such an hypothesis, it would be the height of absurdity to speak of the progress or cultivation of the art; the coming of a poet or painter would be altogether accidental or providential, and the greatest artist might as probably have been Adam, or the first man that ever saw a pencil, as Apelles, or Raffaele, though born under the most favourable circumstances, when the art was in its zenith. Nor ought we to have been more surprised, had Captain Cook found a Rubens carrying painting to perfection in Otaheite, than our ancestors were at seeing one doing the same in Flanders.

Next to the study of nature and the fine examples produced by the art itself, reading of various kinds, chiefly of history, natural history, voyages, travels, works of

imagination, and, above all, of poetry in all its branches, may be considered as affording the most copious fund of materials, and imparting the most powerful stimulus to invention.

Poetry, in particular, bearing the closest analogy to painting, both arts setting out from the same place, journeying to the same end, and requiring the same kind of original powers,—both professing to improve upon their common models, to imitate instead of copying, to avoid the accidental blemishes and imperfections of individual nature—to bring the scenes, actions, and persons represented, before us, with all the attendant circumstances, necessary to elucidate and embellish them, purified and exalted to the highest pitch of energy and beauty, and *such* as, though possible and probable, may never have actually existed,.....we cannot wonder that drinking deep of the Pierian spring should have been forcibly recommended by all writers on the subject, as having the most direct tendency to exercise, warm, invigorate, and enrich the imagination, and excite noble and daring conceptions.

Here however it will be proper to remark, that, though from the acknowledged similarity in the principles and effects of these two arts, the one has been called *mute poesy*, and the other *speaking picture*, such is still the very great diversity in their modes and means of exerting their powers, that the study of one can, at best, be

considered as a *general* only, and, not at all, as a *technical* help to invention in the other: the roads they take, though parallel, lie as entirely apart, and unconnected, as the senses of hearing and seeing, the different gates by which they enter the mind. The one operates in time, the other in space; the medium of the one is sound, of the other colour; and the force of the one is successive and cumulative, of the other collected and instantaneous. Hence the poet, in *his* treatment of a story, is enabled to bespeak the reader's favour by a graceful introduction, describing his characters, relating what has already happened, and showing their present situation, and thus, preparing him for what is to come, to lead him on, step by step, with increasing delight, to the full climax of passion and interest; whilst the painter, on the contrary, deprived of all such auxiliary aid, is obligated to depend on the effect of a single moment. That indeed is the critical moment, in which all the most striking and beautiful circumstances that can be imagined are concentrated, big with suspense, interest, passion, terror, and action; in short, the moment of explosion, which illuminates and brings at once into view the *past*, *present*, and *future*, and which, when well rendered, is often more than equivalent to all the successive energies of the poet.

This contrariety in their means, in some degree, separates and limits their fields of operation; and (though there

are many subjects equally adapted to both arts) calls, in general, for a different principle in the choice of them. The most striking beauties, as presented to one sense, being frequently wholly untranslatable into the language of another, it necessarily results, that many interesting passages in history and poetry are incapable of affording more than a bald and insipid *representation on canvass*. Of this description is the incident in the Iliad, where one of Priam's younger sons, fallen before the superior force of Achilles, solicits his life on account of his youth. "Wretch!" exclaims the furious hero, "dost thou complain of dying, when thou knowest that Achilles must shortly die!" Such also is the celebrated passage in Corneille's Horatii, where the father of one set of the combatants, on being informed that his son, left single against his three antagonists, had turned his back, appears much agitated and enraged; and when one of his attendants asks, "What should your son have done against such a disparity?" instantly retorts, "He should have died." Enthusiastic strokes of energy and sublimity like these, irresistibly command warm and universal admiration; but, unfortunately for the pencil, they defy utterance by any power but words. Of the same class, also, is what passed in the council preceding the Revolution, between James II, and the old Earl of Bedford, whose son, the illustrious Russel, had suffered death in the foregoing reign: "My lord," said the king,

addressing himself to the earl, "you are an honest man, have great credit, and can do me signal service." "Sir," replied the earl, "I am a feeble old man, and very unable to afford you any considerable assistance;—but I had a son," added he, "who, if he had been living, could have served your majesty in a more effectual manner." James was so struck with this reflection, that he forbore to answer another word. This, which is a very striking piece of history, with the other passages just mentioned, and many more of a similar nature, have frequently been pointed out by people unacquainted with the proper limits of art, as subjects well calculated for the pencil; which is so far from being true, that they are all of them deficient in many of the principal requisites to make a good picture: they all allude to distant events and complicated circumstances, enter into feelings which have no decided outward and visible signs, and exhibit only ambiguous expression of countenance and unintelligible action, at which had a deaf man been present, he could have formed no idea of the remarkable peculiarity that distinguishes them from all other incidents, and to which they owe all their power of moving. In addition to this, they are also necessarily deficient in that variety and contrast of forms, ages, sexes, and draperies, which engage and entertain the sight, and sometimes, with skilful management, supply, in a degree, by picturesque effect, the want

of real interest built upon striking situation, palpable sentiment, decided passion, beautiful forms, and energetic action, the proper basis of all subjects peculiarly adapted to painting.

Invention, as a general power, undoubtedly depends on the command of a large fund of ideas, and an intuitive readiness of associating and combining them in every possible mode. This produces those radiant recollections, by which the images of absent things are often almost involuntarily called up, with all the vivacity of real objects moving about us, and pursuing us as in a kind of waking dream. Thus the casual mention of the single word *battle* will to some minds instantly furnish out an endless chain of associated circumstances; cannons roar, clouds of smoke arise, the combatants on each side present themselves, we see them rush together, fight, struggle, and die: we hear their screams and shouts, notice all their various movements and changes of colour, advert to all the surrounding objects, observe how they are affected, and share their hopes, fears, compassion, rage, astonishment, or despair. To an Englishman of warm feelings and a lively fancy, the word would perhaps suggest a different train of associated ideas, connected with another element: *his* imagination would present the picture of a sea-fight in all its accumulated horrors, of ships sunk or blown up, batteries silenced, and whole fleets of the enemy at one



stroke taken or destroyed: it might transport him instantly to Copenhagen, or the banks of the Nile, and force him to dwell with an equal mixture of grief, fondness, and exultation on the unparalleled deeds and the untimely fate of the hero of Trafalgar.

As a technical power, invention consists, not in composing, in the first instance, the story to be represented, but in seizing at once on the peculiar and prominent feature of the subject, placing it in the noblest and most interesting point of view, taking in all that belongs to the time and place chosen, discriminating the characters, entering into their situations, circumstances and relations; and all this with a reference at the same time to the genius and powers of the art, by which they are to be embodied. The painter, for instance, as soon as his mind is affected by the grand or the pathetic, instantly clothes his ideas in all that is touching and awful to the sight, and carries it out through the whole of his composition, which includes the invention and disposition of every part, the managing his back-ground, throwing his lights and shades, and ordering the attitudes, and action, and expression of every figure, that enters into, and constitutes a part of, his work.

But, though, in general, the poet and the painter borrow the skeletons of their stories from a foreign source, it is evident that neither of them holds his art as subservient to any other; their business is something more than to

illustrate, explain, or fill the chasms of history or tradition: each therefore, as soon as he has fixed on a subject, considers the end proposed, examines all the materials presented by his author, and all that his own mind suggests on the occasion, and selects, rejects, retrenches, adds, transposes, and moulds them all anew, till he has made them fit for his purpose; each adopts a chain of circumstances for the most part inapplicable in the case of the other; each avails himself of their common privilege of "daring every thing to accomplish his end;" not scrupling, on some occasions, to run counter, if necessary, even to matter of fact; for, though most strictly bound to the observance of truth and probability, these are obviously very different from such as is required in history; his truth is the truth of effect, and his probability the perfect harmony and congruity of all the parts of his story, and their fitness to bring about the intended effect, that of striking the imagination, touching the passions, and developing in the most forcible manner the leading sentiment of the subject.

"It is allowed on all hands," says Sir J. Reynolds, "that facts, and events, however they may bind the historian, have no dominion over the poet or the painter. With us, history is made to bend and conform to the great idea of art. And why? Because these arts, in their highest province, are not addressed to the gross senses, but to the

desires of the mind, to that spark of divinity which stirs within, impatient of being circumscribed and pent up by the world which is about us. Just so much as our art has of this, just so much of dignity, I had almost said of divinity, it exhibits; and those of our artists who possessed this mark of distinction in the highest degree, acquired from thence the glorious appellation of divine." Lord Bacon also justly observes, that "the human mind is never satisfied with the distribution of things as they are ordinarily met with in common life; it pants after a higher order of excellence, and creates to itself a world of its own, possessing more grandeur, and exhibiting more exalted and more perfect instances of heroism, enthusiasm, patience, fortitude and justice, than the present dispensation of things admits of." The opinions of these great men will probably meet with corresponding sentiments in every breast; for it cannot be doubted, that, to fill this craving void in the imagination, to supply the imperfections of natural objects, to embody the highest possible ideas of excellence, and, finally, to inspire mankind with zeal and affection for all that is truly great and lovely, or, as the poet expresses it,

"To raise the genius and to mend the heart,"

is one of the first and most important, if not the only proper, object of painting and poetry.

The principle of deviating from real fact and individual forms in search of higher excellence, however strange it may appear to such as have paid little attention to the subject, is far from being new or singular; it has indeed been the general opinion of the enlightened part of mankind in all ages. "He," says Proclus, "who takes for his model such forms merely as nature produces, will never attain perfection; for the works of nature are full of dissonance and disproportion, and fall very short of the true standard of beauty. On this account Demetrius was blamed for being too natural, and Dionysius ironically called the *man-painter*. Lysippus, on the contrary, adhering to the precept of Aristotle given to painters and poets, boasted that he made men, not as they were, but as they ought to be; and Phidias astonished all those who beheld the forms he gave to his gods and heroes, not, according to Cicero, by copying any object ever presented to his sight, but by contemplating the more perfect idea of beauty in his mind, to the imitation of which all his skill and labour were directed." From this care to advance their art, even beyond nature itself in her individual productions, arises that admiration, that almost adoration, which is paid by all competent judges, to those divine remains of antiquity, that are come down to us. Hence Phidias, Lysippus, and other great sculptors, are still held in veneration, and Apelles, Zeuxis, Protogenes,

and other excellent painters, though their works have perished, are, and will for ever be, admired. They all, in the glowing language of a celebrated Italian author, "drew after the light of fancy, the exemplars of mind, which alone gives animation, energy, and beauty to art, and causes the loves and the graces to descend and take up their habitation in the hardest marble, and to subsist in the emptiness of light and shadow."

Nor have the moderns, though unable as yet to attain equal perfection, been less convinced than the ancients, of the power of this superior principle in art. Leonardo da Vinci instructs the painter to form this idea to himself, and Raffaello writes thus to Count Castiglione, concerning his *Galatea*; "To paint a beauty it is necessary to see many beauties; but because there is so great a scarcity of lovely women, I am constrained to make use of one certain idea, which I have formed in my own fancy as a model." Thus also Guido Reni, when sending to Rome his picture of St. Michael, painted for the church of the Capuchins, wrote at the same time to Monsignor Monsano, the Pope's steward, in the following manner: "I wish I had had the wings of an angel to have ascended into Paradise, and there to have beheld the forms of beatified spirits, from which I might have copied my archangel; but not being able to mount so high, and it being vain for me to search for his resemblance here below, I was forced to

make an introspection into my own mind, and to have recourse to that idea of beauty, which I had formed in my imagination, for a prototype, where I have likewise created the contrary idea of deformity and ugliness ; but I leave the consideration of that till I paint the devil, and in the mean time shun the very thought of it as much as possible." On this letter it may be remarked that, though Guido felt the necessity of seeking aid from the ideal principle, it is clear he did not understand its full extent and import in art; for the ideal, if it mean any thing, means the selection and assemblage of all that is most powerful and best calculated to produce the wished-for effect, and relates to the management of a whole composition, and to the just delineation of a bad moral character as much as to that of the most beautiful and amiable. Thus Iago, Macbeth, and Shylock, are as beautifully drawn, and as perfect in a dramatic point of view,—perhaps even more so, than Othello, Hamlet, Imogen, or Ophelia. The combination of mere deformity and ugliness can only represent disgusting and contemptible imbecillity, calculated perhaps to frighten children in a nursery, but nothing more : such a picture, to borrow an expression from a noted satirist, might be a damned thing, *but certainly not the devil*. He, " whose face deep scars of thunder had entrenched, who stood like a tower, whose form had not yet lost all its original brightness, nor appeared less than archangel

ruined, and th' excess of glory obscured," must be derived from the same elevated source of invention, and composed, though of different materials, on the same pure and refined technical principle, as his more virtuous and happy antagonist: in the one, must be embodied all that denotes the powerful, the terrible, and the malignant; as, in the other, all that appears majestic, amiable, and beneficent; and nothing, surely, can prove the force of Milton's genius, and the purity of his taste, more decisively than this circumstance, that, while all other poets contented themselves with exhibiting the prince of evil as a wretched, deformed, diminutive, pitiful hobgoblin, he alone, possessed by the true spirit of the ancient painters and sculptors, drew a character of him which, for sublimity of conception, felicity of execution and powerful effect, equals or surpasses any thing of the kind that the art of poetry has yet produced, and which, in its way, may justly be considered as the *ne plus ultra* of human invention.

But, however allowable, and even necessary, the use of poetical licence may be to a painter, he is not therefore to imagine himself warranted in the indulgence of every kind of liberty that caprice or ignorance may suggest. Experience will soon teach him, that though he is not confined to mere fact and the exact shape of his model, nor brought upon oath to declare "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth;" he is yet only freed from the

letter, to bind him more closely to the spirit of his subject, and if he does not show precisely how it happened, he has the harder task assigned him of showing how it *might* and *should* have happened, to make the greatest possible impression on the spectator. His imperfections will not be excused like those of the naturalist and historian, by laying the blame on the original; the unities of time, place, and action must be strictly observed, and, above all, a perfect harmony and consistency of parts and style can never be dispensed with; for, however they may be mixed in *nature*, in *art* the grave will not suit with the gay, nor the ludicrous with the terrible; the heroic and the sacred must never be associated with the mean and the trivial, nor will the authority and masterly execution of a Paul Veronese reconcile us to the ostentatious display of such puerile incidents as a cat clawing the meat, or a dog gnawing a bone, in the foreground of a picture of the Last Supper. Hogarth told his story as perfectly, and with as much ingenuity, as Raffaele; but their styles would bear no mixture, as the meanness of character, and the strokes of wit, humour, and satire, with which the former abounds, and which make so large a part of his merits, would by no means become the classical dignity and energetic gravity of the latter. Such therefore as is his subject, such must be the artist's manner of treating it, and such his choice of accompaniments. His background and every object



in his composition, animate or inanimate, must all belong to one another, and point to the same end; and under these restrictions he tramples with impunity on all vulgar bounds, and scruples not, on great occasions, to press the elements into his service, or even to call in the aid of imaginary beings and supernatural agency, to heighten the terrors of his scene, and more perfectly effect his purpose.

Thus Raffaello, in his picture called the *Incendio del Borgo*, has imagined a tempest, (as appears by the driving volumes of smoke and flame, and by the flying of the hair and draperies of his figures,) to give effect and add to the horrors of the conflagration; and, in another place, holds out the vision of St. Peter and St. Paul, with drawn swords and threatening looks, to wither the strength of Attila, and terrify him from his purpose of entering Rome. Swayed also by similar motives, Shakspeare makes his witches assemble in a subterraneous cavern, or on a blasted heath, "in thunder, lightning, and in rain," and the more surely to excite our pity, and heighten our abhorrence of the cruelty and ingratitude of Lear's daughters, exhibits the old king mad, wandering by night, and exposed bare-headed to all "the pelting of the pitiless storm." In like manner, Milton, to impress on us more forcibly the terrible consequences of the transgression of our first parents, makes the heavens weep, and the earth groan at the completion of that mortal sin, which "brought death into the

world, and all our woe:" and thus Homer, to increase the importance of his heroes, and give dignity and interest to his subject, calls all the elements to his assistance, brings down the celestial, raises the infernal, deities, joins heaven, earth, and hell together, and suspends the fate of mortals and immortals, men and gods, equally on the issue of the combat.

To come nearer to our own times, I know of no one who has availed himself of poetic license with more address than Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his celebrated picture of the Death of Cardinal Beaufort, painted for the Shakspeare Gallery. The varied beauties of this work might well employ a great part of a lecture, but, at present, I shall pass them over, and attend only to what relates immediately to the question before us, the effect of the visionary devil, couched close, and listening eagerly behind the pillow of the dying wretch; which not only invigorates and clothes the subject in its appropriate interest and terror, but immediately clears up all ambiguity, by informing us that those are not bodily sufferings, which we behold so forcibly delineated, that they are not merely the pangs of death, which make him grin, but that his agony proceeds from those daggers of the mind, the overwhelming horrors of a guilty and an awakened conscience. This was the point, on which rested the whole moral effect of the piece; it was absolutely necessary to be understood, and could by no

other means have been so strongly and perspicuously expressed. An expedient, therefore, at once so necessary, so consistent with the spirit of the subject, and so completely successful, far from being regarded as an unwarrantable license, is justifiable by all rules of sound criticism, and ought to be regarded as one of the most signal examples of the invention of the artist.

It is to be lamented that this most poetical incident, producing equal effect, and proceeding from the same power of fancy, as that which caused the weird sisters to rise like bubbles and vanish with their enchanted cauldrons, which forged the air-drawn dagger to marshal Macbeth the way to Duncan, which dictated the resurrection of Banquo's ghost to fill the chair of the murderer, has not as yet been properly felt and appreciated according to its merits. So habituated are the people of this country to the sight of portraiture only, that they can scarcely as yet consider painting in any other light; they will hardly admire a landscape that is not a view of a particular place, nor a history unless composed of likenesses of the persons represented; and are apt to be staggered, confounded, and wholly unprepared to follow such vigorous flights of imagination, as would—as *will* be felt and applauded with enthusiasm, in a more advanced and liberal stage of criticism. In our exhibitions (which often display extraordinary powers wasted on worthless subjects)

one's ear is pained, one's very soul is sick with hearing crowd after crowd, sweeping round and, instead of discussing the merits of the different works on view (as to conception, composition and execution), all reiterating the same dull and tasteless question, *Who is that?* and *Is it like?*—Such being the case, it is no wonder that this work of our great painter has been condemned without mercy, by a set of cold-hearted, fac-simile connoisseurs, who are alike ignorant of the true end and the extensive powers of the art; who forget that Pegasus has wings to carry him unobstructed over mountains and seas, or who wish to have him trimmed, adorned with blinkers, and reduced to canter prettily and properly on a turnpike road. Of the same class were those who of late endeavoured to rob the play of Macbeth of the powerful and affecting incident of the Ghost above alluded to. Happily, however, for the true lovers of Shakspeare, the genuine feelings of the public have decided against this most barbarous mutilation, and happily for the real judges and lovers of painting, the illustrious artist in question, though warned, before the picture was finished, of the outcry that would be raised against his introduction of the busy, meddling fiend, did not give way to his squeamish advisers, but, confiding in his more refined taste, riper judgement, and nicer feelings, boldly committed his claims to POSTERITY, by whom, the debt, due to him from the present age, will

be discharged with interest, provided the art advances here in a manner equal to the expectations which are now universally raised. From the instances already mentioned, to which thousands more, and perhaps stronger, might be added, it may be inferred that all possible license may be granted, and a work elevated to any degree of the extraordinary without incurring the censure of being extravagant, provided—but here the mighty labour lies, which may well deter any attempt much above the ordinary course of nature—provided that the trains of ideas are perfectly connected, and the whole completely consistent with itself; that there is no break or opening between them, nothing of a discordant nature suffered to interpose, to check the progress of the imagination, expose the illusion, and recall a different set of principles to the mind: this is all that is meant by probability in the imitative arts, and with this proviso, and no other, the precept of Horace takes place in its fullest extent, and painters and poets may do any thing.

Invention may be demonstrated in every part of the art: Michael Angelo shows it more particularly in the unrivalled breadth, simplicity, greatness, and energetic character of his forms, and style of design, as well as in the epic grandeur of his conception; Giorgione, and Titian, in being the first who gave the true appearance of visible objects by the force, depth, and richness of their colouring; Cor-

reggio, and Rembrandt, in *chiaro scuro*; and Rubens in composition. All these may be considered as the discoverers of principles, and the givers of features and limbs to the art itself; of whom all who come after are necessarily more or less the copiers; and I have, in consequence, treated of them under the several elementary heads to which they belong. But it yet remains to speak of invention in its more limited and specific sense, that is, the complete comprehension of any given subject in all its parts, or the discovery and combinations of all the circumstances necessary to exhibit it with the utmost precision, truth, and force possible; which, though possessed, in a greater or less degree, by all those I have just mentioned, is the peculiar province of Raffaele alone, in which he reigns supreme, excelling in it not only all the moderns, but, for any thing that appears to the contrary, all the ancients also. Raffaele, more any other man, felt immediately the whole force of his subject, saw what it had, what it wanted, or was fertile in expedients to explain and embellish it, and to supply its deficiencies. No man's mind possessed so wide a range, gathered in so completely all the circumstances belonging to time, place, and action, or combined them with so much skill. No man drew characters so multiplied and so various, discriminated them so nicely, entered so deeply into their feelings, and gave them such clear and decided expressions. Under

the most barren surface he discovered mines sparkling with the richest ores, and, touched by his pencil, the most unpromising subject bursts at once on the spectator, vivid, picturesque, and teeming with circumstances striking, amusing, and instructive. Playing on the utmost verge of possibility, he is never extravagant, and, keeping always within the bounds of probability, he is never insipid; he never sacrifices the primary to a secondary object, but hastens to the important point, and draws, colours, groups his figures, invents, alters, or suppresses incidents, always with a view to the full expression of the principal action of the piece; in short, his story is always told with a grace, probability, perspicuity, ingenuity, force, and pathos, altogether captivating and surprising, and which we may doubt of ever seeing equalled, but are certain of never seeing surpassed. On the whole, therefore, it must be granted to Raffaele, that, notwithstanding he seldom ascended the *brightest* heaven of invention, reached the conception of undescribed being, or rivalled the Greeks in the delineation of perfect beauty, enchanting grace, and character truly super-human, he has perhaps reached the utmost extent of the art in pathos and expression, and so far explored the natural regions, that it is scarcely possible to propose a subject or imagine a situation, within the sphere of humanity, which he has not treated, or in the treatment of which some considerable assistance may not

be derived from his works; and, take him for all in all, he undoubtedly forms the richest, most extensive, and most useful magazine of materials for study; with the least admixture of any thing capable of misleading inexperience, of inspiring false taste, or of flattering the eye at the expense of the understanding.

It is happy for this country that it possesses many of the finest specimens of the powers of Raffaele. The cartoon of the St. Paul preaching at Athens, is, of itself, a school of art, in which the student may find most of the principles of historical invention, composition, and expression, displayed in characters of fire, not addressed to the eye or imagination only, but also to the understanding and the heart. This will be more sensibly felt, and the painter's merit more clearly understood, by comparing his work with another, on the same subject, by Jacobo Bassano, in which that artist has, as usual, contrived to leave out all that dignifies, all that interests, all that characterizes, and all that renders the story peculiarly proper for the pencil. As he knew St. Paul was but a man, he perhaps thought any man might be St. Paul, and taking the first unwashed artificer that came in his way, set him up as a model for the apostle, whom he consequently represents destitute of majesty, grace, action, or energy, and drawling out what no person attends to, or can believe worthy of attention. How different, on the same occasion, was the



conduct of Raffaele! He took into consideration, not the real person of the saint, which is said not to have been of the most imposing class, but the intellectual vigour of his character, the importance of his mission, and the impression that ought to be made on the beholder; and, as a painter cannot make his hero speak like a great man, he knew it was his duty to render his mind visible, and make him look and act like one; and we, accordingly, find him on a raised platform, in a pre-eminent situation equally commanding his audience and the spectators, with parallel outstretched arms, and in an attitude at once simple, energetic, and sublime, thundering with divine enthusiasm against the superstitions and abominations of the heathen, and seeming, in the language of the prophet, to call on heaven and earth, to bear witness to the truth of his doctrine.

Instead of Athens, the university of the world, abounding with statues, adorned with all that is elegant and magnificent in architecture, and displaying, on every side, marks of unrivalled opulence and the most refined taste, Bassan presents us with three or four miserable huts, unworthy even of the name of a village, and, for an audience, we have a few half-naked peasants of the lowest class, with their wives and children, suited however, it must be confessed, to the preacher, to whom they pay at least as much attention as he deserves; that is, they neither hear nor see him, but proceed quietly in gathering

apples, pressing grapes, shearing sheep, or their other usual employments. This artist painted what he saw admirably well, but he saw with his eye only: destitute of imagination, and ignorant of the powers of his art, of the time, place, nature, extent, and importance of his subject, he could not, like Raffaello, transport us to Greece, and set us down in the midst of an assembly of philosophers; he could not penetrate their minds, discriminate their characters, nor, by their different expressions of curiosity, meditation, incredulity, contempt, and rankling malice, enable us, with no great assistance from fancy, to distinguish the Stoic, the Cynic, the Epicurean, the Jew Rabbi, and others appropriate to the occasion. We do not, as in the cartoon, see one touched, another confounded, a third inflamed, and a fourth appalled by the irresistible force of that eloquence, which, in the full conviction of Dionysius and Damaris, manifests its ultimate success, ensures the downfall of polytheism, and the final triumph and establishment of Christianity.

Such are the powers of the pencil, when under the direction of a comprehensive mind; but it behoves every artist to measure his wings before he takes his flight, to appreciate his powers before he chooses his subject: otherwise, the greater the attempt, with inadequate abilities, the greater and more ridiculous will be the failure; as may be seen by Bassan; who in painting brass pots, copper

kettles, and even men and women of the lowest class, and in their ordinary employments, had scarcely an equal; and his pictures, where nothing higher is attempted, though not calculated to live in description, afford great pleasure to the sight by the freshness and harmony of the colouring, the spirit of the touch, and the illusive truth of the effect of the whole.

That Raffaele was qualified to do justice to a great subject, appears by the foregoing instance; that he equally knew how to enrich a barren one, will be seen by what follows; for where can be found a more decisive proof of invention, I had almost said creation, than in the cartoon of Christ's charge to Peter?—a subject which, I will venture to say, offers very little, capable of tempting a common mind, and common powers, to undertake it. But, however slightly the incident is touched by the historian, and however meagre it may appear in the book, in Raffaele the whole is full, animated, connected, rounded, and *wound up to the highest pitch*, and, for conception, discrimination of character, composition, and expression, stands forward as one of his most distinguished works. In this picture, the apostles are all collected into one compact group, as would naturally happen when any important communication was expected; and the Saviour, both by his majestic simplicity of action, and his detached situation, is evidently the principal figure of the piece. Before

him St. Peter kneels, with joyful reverence, to receive the sacred charge; St John, the beloved disciple, who may be supposed to feel some mortification at this choice of a pastor, presses forward with enthusiasm, as if to shew that, in zeal and affection, he yields to no one; and the rest, though all *attentive* and *dignified*, are varied both in attitude and expression, with an extraordinary and surprising felicity of *management*,—some seeming to feel complete satisfaction in the preference given to Peter,—some to doubt its propriety,—some appear inclined to whisper disapprobation,—while the gestures of others betray their subjection to the dæmon of *envy*.—All these varied and contrasted emotions, accompanied each by its appropriate action, and physiognomical character and temperament, which display so deep an insight into the human mind, are the pure offspring of the artist's imagination, and so happily supply the deficiencies of the historian, that, far from weakening or contradicting, they at once aggrandize, embellish, and render the truth more lively, probable, and affecting.

It would be endless to enumerate all the instances of invention, so profusely scattered over the works of Raffaele, many of which, also, it would be difficult or impossible to explain, without having the pictures, or engravings from them, before us. I shall therefore content myself with adducing one more remarkable example of

his powers in expression, and his ingenuity in telling his story.

In the cartoon of the Sacrifice at Lystra, the inhabitants of that city, it appears, are about to offer divine honours to Paul and Barnabas; and it was necessary that the cause of this extraordinary enthusiasm, the restoring the limb of a cripple, should be explained; which, to any powers less than those under consideration, would perhaps have been insurmountable, for this reason, that painting having only the choice of one single moment of time, if we take the instant before the performance of the miracle, how can we shew that it ever took place? if we adopt the instant after, how shall it appear that the man had ever been a cripple? Raffaele has chosen the latter; and, by throwing his now useless crutches on the ground, giving him the uncertain and staggering attitude of a man accustomed to support, and still in some degree doubtful of his newly acquired power, and by the uncommon eagerness with which he makes him address his benefactors, points out both his gratitude and the occasion of it; and, still further to do away any remnant of ambiguity, he introduces a man of a respectable appearance, who, lifting up a corner of the patient's drapery, surveys with unfeigned astonishment the newly and perfectly formed limb; in which he is also joined by others of the bystanders. Such a chain of circumstances, as Webb justly observes, equal to a narration in clearness,

and infinitely superior in force, would have done honour to the inventor, in the happiest æra of painting in Greece.

But, though no man can more sensibly feel the force of Raffaelle's extraordinary powers, I cannot agree with a celebrated author, in justifying him for making the boat, in the cartoon of *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, so exceedingly too diminutive for the figures it carries. "Had this boat," says Richardson, "been proportioned to the figures, it would have filled the picture; and, had the figures been reduced to a smaller scale, they would not have accorded with the rest of the set;" and hence he infers, that this apparent defect is the strongest proof of the judgement of the artist, in choosing the least of two evils, one of which was inevitable. But, unfortunately for this certainly ingenious defence, both the evils might have been easily avoided, two ways; first, by not bringing the whole of the boat into the picture; and secondly, which would have been the most masterly, by giving a fore-shortened view of it, in which case it would have appeared of the proper capacity, without occupying more space on the canvass than it does at present. This, and a few other trifling errors, such as his making a house on fire in the back ground of one cartoon, and the introduction of a naked child in the fore ground of another, may be mentioned, not as detracting any thing from the superlative merits of Raffaelle, against which, had they been

ten times more numerous, they would be but as dust in the balance, but merely to shew that no authority, however gigantic, ought to be made a cover to negligence, or a sanction to impropriety.

The study of excellent works of every class, and, more particularly, of such as I have been mentioning, is a certain way to improve, if not to create, an inventive faculty, and I have no doubt that a person comparatively poor in natural gifts, who steadily pursues his purpose, and makes use of all the means open to him, would soon eclipse the strongest in native ability, who neglects them, and trusts to himself alone;—which, after all, would be an attempt as ridiculous as arrogant—for, whether we wish it or no, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand of our thoughts, are necessarily suggested by the works of others.

# LECTURE III.

READ AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

*March 2, 1807.*





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IN reading the History of Painting, the pride of an Englishman cannot fail to be mortified while he observes, that the encouragement of the art has, till very lately, been solely confined to the continent; that we hear nothing of British schools, establishments, painters, or patrons; that all writers on the subject seem to consider the hyperborean fogs of England as completely inimical, and impervious to the rays of taste; and that, however justly we may boast our superiority in some points, the country has hitherto been forced to allow its deficiency in the most refined branch of civilization, and content itself with a very subordinate rank among those who have aspired to the patronage of the fine arts.

Considering the energy of the British character, and the distinguished importance of the nation in the scale of

Europe, can we wonder that this extreme deficiency, in points so essential to national honour, should have given rise to many contemptuous remarks, and much vain speculation, respecting the causes of it? But whatever the causes may be, (and, doubtless, they cannot be derived from any creditable source,) the assertions of Winckelman, Abbé du Bos, and others, that the nation which has produced a Bacon, a Newton, a Milton, and a Shakspeare, is naturally incapable of succeeding in painting, are an insult to common sense, originating in conceit, malice, or a confirmed stupidity, only to be equalled by the folly of another set of good-natured continental philosophers, who, confining taste to certain parallels, discover the genius of nations by a map and a pair of compasses, and wisely determine that no country, situated in a higher latitude than fifty degrees north, can succeed in the cultivation of the arts. Such puerilities deserve no answer. The causes that first obstructed, and perhaps still in some degree continue to retard, the progress of the arts in this island, are, by an ingenious writer, clearly proved to be the Reformation, and its immediate consequences. In throwing off the Roman yoke, with all its impositions and superstitions, the nation unfortunately mistook reverse of wrong for right, and, because the arts were respected and patronised at Rome, rashly concluded that therefore they were certainly of a diabolical origin, and ought to be held

up as objects of peculiar aversion, and abhorrence, to all true believers. Hence painting, in England, denied all public support, every noble use of it prohibited, and every source of encouragement to its higher branches effectually dammed up, sunk into mere portraiture, the parasite of personal vanity, and was condemned, for centuries, to "flatter fools and chronicle small beer."

Happily, this intolerable bigotry is now nearly extinct, and a lover of painting is no longer in danger of being considered as an idolater; but, though taste revives, and the arts begin to be received on a more respectable footing, it must still be confessed that little or no attempt has yet been made to rectify past errors, and do away this national opprobrium. Our halls and public buildings, instead of having their walls made the records of the virtues and heroic actions of our ancestors, and the oracles of philosophy, patriotism, and humanity, still remain barren and desolate; and our churches and temples, destitute of all appropriate ornament corresponding to the magnificence of the architecture, appear more like prisons or the dreary haunts of perturbed spirits, than places of worship for a devout, elegant, and enlightened people.

That this *has been* the case, though it must be lamented, it cannot perhaps be wondered at; but that this should *still be the case*—notwithstanding the growth of taste and more liberal opinions, notwithstanding the foundation of

the Royal Academy, and the spirited example of the First Individual in the country,—notwithstanding the generous offer of the English artists, some years ago, to decorate St. Paul's cathedral at their own expense, and notwithstanding they have proved the practicability of raising the British character, in regard to the arts, as high as it justly stands in all other respects, by their having become the first school at present in Europe, on the mere scraps, offals, and *dog's-meat* of patronage, afforded by hungry speculators, or falling by chance from the old masters' tables,—*this is to be wondered at*. And, taking also the opulence of the nation into the consideration, in addition to all other circumstances, I cannot but think the apathy of the public in regard to the arts is a something not easy to be accounted for. I hasten therefore to dismiss the subject, lest, on a further view, I should become an apostate to myself, and go over to the opinions of those shallow continental critics, whom I have just been attempting to hold up to ridicule and contempt.

One cause, however, of the discouragement of English art I will mention, which, though not to be charged with the whole, certainly contributes very considerably to the weight of the evil; that is, the vast and continued influx of old pictures into every part of the kingdom, more than nine tenths of which, to the eye of true taste, offer nothing but a battered mediocrity, or worse, bad originals and bad

copies of bad originals, smoked, varnished, and puffed into celebrity by interested dealers and ignorant connoisseurs, and sold for sums that would have astonished the artists, under whose names they are fraudulently passed ; to the utter starvation of all national attempts at excellence, which it is the business of these people to obstruct and decry, lest the public should, by degrees, become enlightened, and their property and markets be lost. I would not be illiberal,—amongst these importers and dealers there are, no doubt, some, who are well intentioned, who think they are rendering their country a service, by the introduction of works capable of exciting the dormant genius of their countrymen, and serving them as models for study and improvement,—peace to all such!—it is proper, however, to tell them, that this is mere Galvanic encouragement ; it may excite a few convulsive twitches, but will never inspire the arts with life and efficient activity: they should also be informed, that it is practice, and not models, which the artists of this country stand in need of, and that he who employs the humblest artist in the humblest way of history, contributes more to the advancement of national genius, than he that imports a thousand *chefs d'œuvres*, the produce of a foreign land. Let us, then, hear no more of dealers, as patrons of art ! they are no true votaries—they are but buyers and sellers

in the temple of Taste, and, when the deity himself comes, will be driven forth with ignominy and stripes.

Before I quit this ungrateful theme, candour requires me to state, that opinions differ even on this subject:—it has lately, to my great surprise, been discovered, that in no age or country have the arts been so splendidly and liberally encouraged as in England;—that all proper stimulus has here been applied to exertion;—that no artist has wanted employment, but through his own demerits, and that all complaints and remonstrances are neither more nor less than libels on the nation. Hear this! injured, but immortal, shades of Hogarth! Wilson! Barry! Proctor! and many others equalled with you in fate! of Hogarth, who was compelled to dispose of works of infinite, and till then unknown and unimagined excellence, by the disgraceful modes of raffle or auction, and who, in his ironical way, gave his opinion on the point in question, by dedicating one of his most beautiful prints to the king of Prussia, a patron of the arts;—of Wilson, who, though second to no name of any school or country in classical and heroic landscape, succeeded with difficulty, by pawning some of his works at the age of 70, in procuring ten guineas, to carry him to die in unhonoured and unnoticed obscurity in Wales;—and of Barry, who, scorning to prostitute his talents to portraiture or paper staining, was ne-

cessitated, after the most unparalleled exertions, and more than monastic privations, to accept of charitable contribution, and at last received his death-stroke at a sixpenny ordinary!—It may however afford some consolation and some *hope*, to observe, that the public felt for Barry, that they acknowledged his abilities—subscribed readily to his necessities, and at least

“ Help to bury whom they helped to starve.”

Here I cannot but observe with pleasure, that, since the above remarks were written, an event of a highly satisfactory nature has taken place, which every lover of the arts and his country must hail with heart-felt satisfaction.

Richardson, in his excellent treatise on the Theory of Painting, declares, he has no doubt that the time is fast approaching, when many English names will be found worthy to stand high in the list of modern artists; and, in another place, he says, “ I am no prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but in considering the necessary concatenation of causes and effects, and in judging by some few visible links of the chain, I feel assured, that, if ever the true taste of the ancients revives in full vigour and purity, it will be in England.” However visionary this expectation might have appeared in the author’s life time, the first part has already proved well founded: the names of Reynolds, Gainsborough, Wilson, Hogarth, Barry, and many others, would undoubtedly do honour to any modern



school. Their works have for ever decided the question respecting the capacity of the English for excelling in painting; and the enthusiasm, with which their success has inspired their successors, joined to the circumstance to which I just now alluded, the establishment of the British Institution, gives us abundant reason to hope, that the full accomplishment of Richardson's prophecy will not long be delayed. The efforts of a powerful and patriotic body, composed of the first in rank, taste, knowledge, influence, and liberality, if properly directed, cannot fail of success. On them, therefore, every eye is turned, with a grateful confidence, that measures will speedily be adopted to put the hitherto neglected arts on a firm and respectable basis; to disseminate their principles; and forward the cultivation of them, in that style and on that scale, best suited to their dignity and importance, best calculated to confer honour on the country, and hasten that desired period, when on this, as on every other ground, we may see,

“ Britain, conscious of her claim,  
“ Stand emulous of Greek and Roman fame.”

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AFTER Drawing, which I have already treated of as the only proper and stable foundation of the art, the next most important requisite, towards obtaining the true repre-

sentation of natural appearances, is the application of light and shadow, or rather, what the Italians understand by the term *chiaro scuro*, which includes not only light and shadow, as it affects each separate part, but the proper division and distribution of the whole surface of a picture into bright or dark masses, whether the darkness be produced by shadow, or by the proper colour of some of the objects represented. A black horse, or a black cloak, a brown, a deep red, or deep blue object, for instance, will be part of the obscure of a picture, even though it be painted as with the light falling on it. By light and shadow all objects, and parts of objects, are made to project or recede, to strike or retire, to court or to shun the attention of the spectator, agreeably to truth and propriety: what, as a mere drawing, was flat, tame and monotonous, by the aid of this principle bursts forth at once into roundness and reality; entire figures are detached from their ground, seem surrounded by air, and spring forward to meet the eye with all the energy of life. Thus the painting of a Venus, by an ancient artist, was said to start from the canvass, as if she wished to be pursued. It gives depth, and marks the various distances of objects, one behind another: and, if drawing be the giver of form, light and shadow must be allowed to be the creator of *body* and *space*.

In addition to this, if properly managed, it contributes infinitely to expression and sentiment; it lulls by breadth



and gentle gradation, strikes by contrast, and rouses by abrupt transition. All that is grave, impressive, awful, mysterious, sublime or dreadful in nature, is nearly connected with it. All poetical scenery, real or imaginary, 'of forests and enchantments drear,' where more is meant than is expressed; all the effects of solemn twilight, and visionary obscurity, that flings half an image on the aching sight; all the terrors of storm, and the horrors of conflagration, are indebted to it for representation on canvass: it is the medium of enchanting softness and repose, in the works of some painters, and the vehicle, by which others have risen to sublimity, in spite of the want of almost every other excellence. In allusion to these known and acknowledged effects, the magic of light and shade is become a proverb.

The power of expressing the simple effects of light on detached objects may easily be acquired by drawing and shading after nature, but the knowledge of *chiaro scuro* in its general acceptation, (consisting, as I have already observed, in the proper division of the whole surface of a picture into light or dark masses, with the connecting gradations of middle tint, local colour, and reflexes,) can only be learnt by joining to practice a scientific observation of the more enlarged phænomena of nature, and a thorough investigation of the works of those masters, who have excelled in this important branch of the art.

By scientific observation, it is not to be understood that a painter must necessarily be profoundly versed in optics: a general knowledge of its leading principles will be sufficient. He must consider this science, like anatomy, as a *means*, not as an end; otherwise he may waste his time in acquiring what will be of little or no value to him, instead of applying all his strength in the proper direction. He must be unwearied in observing nature in reference to his art, in watching all her effects, and in considering how they may be applied to relieve, vary, and enliven the different parts of his compositions, not only in regard to pleasing the eye, but also in respect to the mind and feelings, as they tend to inspire gaiety, to infuse melancholy, or awaken terror.

By studying the works of the great masters of *chiaro scuro*, he will, by degrees, become acquainted with all the artifices of contrasting light to shade, and colour to colour, to produce *relievo*; of joining light objects together, and dark objects together in masses, in order to produce splendour and breadth of effect; of gradually sinking some objects wholly, or, partly, in shadow, and losing their outlines in the ground, to produce softness and harmony; and of making, in other places, abrupt breaks and sharp transitions, to produce vivacity and spirit. He will also learn their rules for shaping their masses, and of adapting them, in regard to force or softness, to the nature of the subject,

whether grave or gay, sublime, melancholy, or terrible: by this he must be directed when to give his light the form of a globe, or when to send it in a stream across his canvass; when to make a dark mass on a light ground, or a light mass on a dark ground; when he may let his light die away by imperceptible gradations, when to diffuse it in greater breadth and abundance, and when it may more properly be concentrated into one vivid flash.

These are some of the most approved methods of conducting the *chiaro scuro*, the ends of which, as may be inferred from what I have already said, are three; first, by dividing the surface of the picture into light and dark masses, to please the eye and prevent that confusion and perplexity incident to its being attracted by too great a number of parts of equal importance at once; secondly, to relieve, or push into notice, the principal objects, and to keep others in proper subjection, or sink them into obscurity, according to their several degrees of consequence or use in the composition; and lastly, by the manner of it, to aid expression, and give the first impression of the nature, and predominant sentiment, of the piece. But whether, in conformity to the prevailing passion, the shadows roll in midnight masses, enveloping the greater part of the picture, or are so faint as to be scarcely perceptible; whether they break with abrupt violence, or sweetly and gently steal upon the sight; whether they are warmed

and enlivened by reflexes, or preserve a sullen and uniform breadth; one quality they should never, under any circumstances, be without, and that is *transparency*, which, at the same time that it is indispensable, is unfortunately one of the greatest practical difficulties of the art. Of that which depends on delicacy of eye, dexterity of hand, and practical knowledge of the materials, little of course can be explained by words; but every one will easily perceive by experiment, and by study of the works of others, that a dark colour, laid thin upon a light one, will generally appear clear and pleasant, but that a light colour, laid thin upon a dark one, is almost always opaque and disagreeable. Hence the most efficacious way of preserving the transparency of shadows is to paint them rather faint at first, and give them their full warmth and depth by a second operation.

The *chiaro scuro* of a picture does not, however, depend on lights and shadows merely. Hot and cold, bright and dark colours start from and avoid one another, with nearly as much vivacity as light from shadow; but a composition, painted entirely on this principle, will necessarily be feeble and flimsy, from the want of roundness and depth, which it is the property of shadow alone to bestow. Good pictures must partake of both principles; leaning to the opposition of *colours* in subjects of a gay, and to the opposition of *light and shadow* in subjects of a graver or

grander cast\*. But, whatever be your subject, let your principal mass of light maintain its pre-eminence in size and splendour, like the centre of the system, from which all the others emanate, and by which they are all supported. Let the inferior ones be diversified in shape and quantity, as much as possible; for equal quantities, and similar shapes, always produce hesitation and perplexity, unless the reason for it be immediately obvious; and, in addition to this, let your masses, if possible, lie somewhat in an oblique or diagonal direction with respect to each other, by which they will appear to fall more naturally into the stream of light, and consequently be more pleasing to the eye.

I would be far from recommending, or countenancing, a careless or inaccurate manner of handling; but, whilst I allow the necessity of your attention to the detail of your performances, I feel it my duty also to caution you not to neglect the general effect, and call upon you to remember, that, unless a breadth of light and shadow be preserved, invention loses half its force, drawing half its value, and the utmost finishing will be labour in vain.

† Every man in every profession must frequently find him-

\* Rubens depends too much on opposition of colours.

† The following passage, as far as to "management of his *chiaro scuro*," was found on a loose paper lying at this part of the discourse, and is therefore here inserted. E.

self compelled to listen to common-place opinions on the subject of it, copied from author to author, and bandied from critic to critic without sufficient examination. Among others of this description, concerning painting, I have often heard it dogmatically asserted, that the light of a picture must necessarily be all derived from the same source; and consequently, that two rays or streams should never cross each other, nor the shadows be seen to fall in opposite directions. This opinion I have no hesitation in pronouncing a vulgar error, wholly unfounded in nature, and therefore likely to be mischievous in art.

In nature, particularly in the interior of buildings and other confined situations, lights will be often observed flowing from different and opposite sources; and the works of the great masters must quickly convince all who study them, that, *in art*, provided the effects of them be truly represented, and the masses, that compose the *chiaro scuro* of the picture, be kept undisturbed and unbroken; the painter is at perfect liberty to introduce his lights in different directions; which, if well managed and properly accounted for, will be so far from creating confusion, that, on the contrary, they may impart to his composition a richness, splendour, and vivacity, unattainable by any other means.

I mention this to free the student from the weight of unnecessary shackles; but I would by no means recom-



mend his attempting the use of light in two or more directions, till he has acquired a thorough knowledge of its effects in its most simple mode, and a competent skill in the management of his *chiaro scuro*.

It is not one of the least remarkable circumstances in the history of the art, that shadow, though the inseparable companion of light, the only criterion to the eye of roundness and projection, and, in its effects, no less pleasing than surprising, should have continued unknown and unnoticed for ages; by the Indians, the Persians, and the Egyptians anciently, and by the Chinese even to the present day. The fact however seems indisputable; and some have even gone so far as to assert, that the Greeks were, equally with their neighbours, ignorant of this fascinating branch of the art; but for this calumny there appears not the shadow of a foundation; the works of their poets, orators and philosophers abound with allusions to, and passages in the most lively manner describing, its effects. Longinus observes, that if we place, in parallel lines on the same plane, a bright and an obscure colour, the former springs forward and appears much nearer the eye;—this is the first and simplest effect of the laws of *chiaro scuro*. Philostratus also tells us, that Zeuxis, Polygnotus, and Euphranor were, above all things, attentive to shade happily their figures; and hence it was, no doubt, that the paintings of Parrhasius were termed realities, being possessed of such

a force of *chiaro scuro*, as no longer to appear the imitations of things, but the things themselves. Agreeable to this, is the observation of an ancient writer, that, in painting, the contours of objects should be blended with, and sometimes lost in, the shade; for on this, joined to colouring, depend tenderness, roundness, and the similitude to truth. Nicias, the Athenian, is also praised by Pliny for his knowledge in this branch of the art. He preserved the lights and shades, and was particularly careful that his paintings should project from the canvass. But the greatest effect of this kind is by the same author attributed to the pencil of Apelles: "In his portrait of Alexander in the character of Jupiter, (says Pliny,) the fingers seem to shoot forward, and the thunder to be out of the picture." This passage is too striking to need a comment. What more could we say of the finest examples of modern art? What more could we expect from the pencil even of Rembrandt or of Reynolds!

These quotations, to which innumerable others of equal weight might be added, are sufficient to rescue the Greeks from any imputation of ignorance on this head, were we not, also, in possession of ancient paintings, which, though not of that kind in which we ought to expect examples of the first class, certainly contain merit enough to set the matter in question beyond dispute.

In the history of modern art, we find, as might be expected

from what has just been stated, that design and colouring take the lead considerably. Two hundred years elapsed from the time of Cimabue, with whom the modern accounts commence, to the time of Leonardo da Vinci, during which the succession of painters is complete, and a regular gradation of improvement noticed; yet we find no mention of effects of light and shadow; and, if any attempts of that kind were made, we must conclude they were so faint and ineffectual, as not to deserve observation, till the last-mentioned painter, whose character I have dwelt on in a former lecture, broke at once entirely through, and trampled underfoot, the timid, flat, dry, and meagre manner of his predecessors, and taught his contemporaries and posterity to give relief and effect to their compositions, by a novel and daring opposition of light and shade. From him the surprising discovery was caught by Giorgione del Castel-franco, and carried to Venice, where, united to a new style of colouring, it rapidly spread its fascination, and became the foundation of the excellence of the Venetian school.

*Chiaro scuro* and colouring, being but varied effects of the same medium, assimilate so kindly together, that, since the time of their junction at Venice, no school, and scarcely any individual artist, has existed, who has been eminent in one of those branches, without at the same time possessing considerable excellence in the other.

By this union, aided by the introduction of oil painting, which supplies, through the medium of glazing, richer, deeper, and more perfect shadows and tones than any other method, the Venetians were enabled to give that clearness, force, relieve,—in short, that perfect illusion, which amounted, in their limited conceptions of the subject, to a complete representation of nature:—I say their limited conceptions, because, though “the gorgeous East with richest hand” showered pearls and gold into the lap of Venice, (and painting was in consequence liberally and enthusiastically encouraged,) she possessed no remains of antique sculpture, to elevate the imaginations of her artists, generate ideas of true beauty, and lead them to attempt combinations of greater purity and consistency than are to be met with in ordinary life. Acquainted more with Asiatic luxury, than with Grecian taste, the painters of Venice sought rather for magnificence than grandeur,—are more remarkable for splendour than for elegance, and possess more truth of effect than refinement of character, in their works.

Correctness of design, being in nowise necessary to illusion, was of course neither attempted nor thought of by them; and painting, under their tuition, instead of speaking an universal language, equally intelligible to all nations and in all ages, only learned to speak with surprising volubility her mother tongue. It cannot be denied that they painted

nature ; but it was nature in its every day dress, disfigured by accident—unchosen—unimproved—and “ sent to its account with all its imperfections on its head.”

Of the works of Giorgione, the real founder of the Venetian school, there are many specimens, now existing in this country, which, for harmony of colour and depth of tone, are still deservedly objects of great admiration, and prove him to have excelled his master Da Vinci in these qualities, as much as he was himself afterwards exceeded by Titian. His genius, indeed, was such, that, had he not been cut off by the plague at the early age of thirty-two, it is not probable that he would ever have been outstripped by his more fortunate rival and companion.

As Titian, though a great master of chiaro scuro, was still more eminent for colouring, I shall reserve his character to be particularly discussed under that head, and pass on to the consideration of the merits of the Lombard school ; at the top of which stands the name of Antonio Allegri, commonly called, from the place of his birth, Correggio. Of this extraordinary man, who, (to use the words of Milton)

“ Untwisted all the strings that tie  
The hidden soul of harmony,”—

the accounts, which are transmitted to us, are more confused, contradictory, and uncertain, than those of any

other painter of eminence. His age, the times of his birth and death, and most of the circumstances of his life, are enveloped in an obscurity, which seems to increase with every attempt at its elucidation.

By some, we are told that he was born, bred, and lived in poverty and wretchedness, and that he died at the age of forty, from the fatigue of carrying home a sack of half-pence, or copper money, paid him for one of his grandest works; and we are called upon to admire and respect a genius, who, against the ordinary course of things, without having seen Rome, the works of the ancients, or those of the great painters, his contemporaries, without favour or protection, or going from home to seek them, in straitened circumstances, and with no other helps than his own industry, the contemplation of nature, and the affection he had for his art, has produced works of a sublime kind, both for thought and execution.

On the other hand, Mengs, his most devoted admirer, who made every possible inquiry concerning him, contends, that he was of a good family; and lived in opulence; that he had every advantage of education, both general and professional; that he had been at Rome and Florence, and had consequently seen the works of Da Vinci, Michael Angelo, and Raffaele; that he studied philosophy, mathematics, painting, sculpture, and architecture, and eph-

versed familiarly with the most famous professors of his time.

Though this latter opinion seems to be founded on but a questionable authority, I own I am inclined to adopt it in a great degree, as, to any attentive examiner of the works of Correggio, the former account must appear absolutely incredible. The evidence of his works would lead one to conclude, that he had not only seen those of the last-mentioned painters, but also the works of Titian; and that he had borrowed the elements of light and shade from the first, something of the grandeur of his contour from the second, and colouring from the last; to which he superadded qualities peculiarly his own, and formed a style, which, though less learned in design than that of Michael Angelo, and less true in colouring than that of Titian, infinitely exceeded Da Vinci's in force, and was, on the whole, more exquisitely captivating to the eye, than any thing that had yet appeared in the art.

Of *chiaro scuro*, on the grandest scale, as it extends to the regulation of the *whole* of a work, he was certainly the inventor. Antecedently to him, no painter had attempted, or even imagined the magic effect of this principle, which is strikingly predominant in all that remains of Correggio, from his widely extended cupolas, to the smallest of his oil paintings: its sway was uncontrollable; parts were en-

lightened, extended, curtailed, obscured, or buried in the deepest shade, in compliance with its dictates ; and whatever interfered, (even correctness of form, propriety of action, and characteristic attitude) was occasionally sacrificed.

To describe his practice will be in a great degree to repeat my observations on *chiaro scuro*, in its enlarged sense. By classing his colours, and judiciously dividing them into few and large masses of bright and obscure, gently rounding off his light, and passing, by almost imperceptible degrees, through pellucid demi-tints and warm reflexions, into broad, deep, and transparent shade, he artfully connected the fiercest extremes of light and shadow, harmonized the most intense opposition of colours, and combined the greatest possible *effect* with the sweetest and softest *repose imaginable*. The same principle of easy gradation seems to have operated as his guide in respect to design, as well as in colouring and *chiaro scuro*. By avoiding straight lines, sharp angles, all abrupt breaks, sudden transitions, and petty inflexions, and running by gentle degrees from convex to concave, and *vice versa*, together with the adoption of such forms and attitudes, as admitted this practice in the highest degree, he gave his figures that ease, elegance, and flexibility, that *inimitable grace*, which, in honour of the inventor, has since obtained the appellation of *Correggiesque* !



This rare union of grace, harmony, and effect, forms the skill of Correggio, which, whilst it operates, suspends judgment and disarms criticism. Entranced and overcome by pleasing sensation, the spectator is often compelled to forget incorrectness of drawing, and deficiency of expression and character. These defects, however, it has already been observed, are but occasional; and though, in comparing him with Raffaele, it may justly be said, that the one painted best the effects of body, and the other those of mind, it must also be acknowledged, that modesty, sweetness, and the effusions of maternal tenderness have never been more forcibly expressed than by the pencil of Correggio.

The turn of his thoughts, also, in regard to particular subjects, was often, in the highest degree, poetical and uncommon; of which it will be sufficient to give, as an instance, his celebrated *Notte*, or painting of the Nativity of Christ, in which the circumstance of his making all the light of the picture emanate from the child, striking upward on the beautiful face of the mother, and, in all directions, on the surrounding objects, may challenge comparison with any invention in the whole circle of art, both for the splendour and sweetness of the effect, which nothing can exceed, and for its happy appropriation to the person of him, who was born to dispel the clouds of ignorance, and diffuse the light of truth over a darkened world!

This circumstance, at once sublime, beautiful, and picturesque, is one of those rare instances of supreme felicity, by which a man may be said to be lost in his own glory. The thought has been seized with such avidity, and produced so many imitations, that no one is accused of plagiarism; the real author is forgotten, and the public, habituated to consider the incident as naturally a part of the subject, have long ceased to inquire when or by whom it was invented.

From Correggio, in pursuing the progress of *chiaro scuro*, we naturally turn our attention to the Carracci, the founders of the Bolognese school, who, though not absolutely equal to their great predecessor in *chiaro scuro*, excelled him in design, and perhaps in some other branches of the art. Ludovico, in particular, is highly and justly extolled for the modest breadth, and affecting simplicity, of his style, and pointed out by Sir Joshua Reynolds, as the best model for that dignified tone, that *solemn twilight*, so productive of sentiment, and so properly and exclusively suited to all subjects of a grave, philosophical, or religious character.

Ludovico, with his two cousins, Annibal and Agostino Carracci, attempted, by selecting the beauties, supplying the defects, correcting the errors and avoiding the extremes of their predecessors, to unite all the excellencies of the

art, and form a perfect style:—a plan, which has been derided by some eminent critics, as absurd, visionary and impracticable; but, as they have neglected to show wherein the different merits of the different schools are incompatible with each other, so they have failed to convince me that the attempt to reconcile them was ill-judged, and tended, directly or indirectly, to mediocrity and the extinction of character. What if the Carracci have not completely succeeded? What if they be, in some degree, inferior to each of those whom they proposed to imitate, in his particular way?—to Michael Angelo in design, to Raffaello in expression, to Titian in colour, and to Correggio in force and harmony of *chiaro scuro*? The combination, as far as it goes, is excellent; and that it is not more so, is undoubtedly owing to nothing absurd in the attempt, but to insufficiency of ability to carry it properly into execution. For where is the proof, that all the different beauties of art are not in perfect unison with each other? That the whole is more difficult to grasp than a part, is not to be denied; but let us beware of making our feebleness the measure of possibility. Had there been more correctness in the drawing, more elevation in the character, and more truth in the expressions of the celebrated picture by Correggio, just mentioned, can it be supposed that its effect would therefore have been less splendid and fascinating? and

had the Transfiguration, by Raffaello, partaken more of Michael Angelo's grand style of design, and of the breadth and splendour of Correggio's *chiaro scuro*, which the subject seems particularly to demand, can it be supposed that these excellencies would have lessened in any degree the truth of expression, which it now possesses, and that it would therefore have become insipid? Can it be supposed that The Hours leading out the Horses of the Sun, painted by Julio Romano, would have been less poetical and celestial, had they possessed more harmony, brilliancy, and truth of colouring? Yet this has been supposed, and by a writer whose name I revere, and whose works will be an honour to this country as long as taste and genius continue to attract admiration. But though I respect *him* much, I respect *truth* more, which I think will bear me out in maintaining the contrary opinion. Celestial objects, according to our conceptions of them, differ from terrestrial ones, not in essence but in beauty, not in principle but in power; and our representations of them should possess all the splendour and effect, as well as all the vigour, spirit, and elevation of character, possible. To a certain portion of spirit and character it was doubtless owing, that, in *spite* of, and not by the aid of, defects, Julio Romano's horses became objects of admiration; and, had these excellencies been joined to the others with

which they are always associated in our minds, the effect of the work must have been proportionally greater, and it would have consequently stood still higher in the scale of art.

Such paradoxical opinions cannot be too closely examined, as they tend directly to arrest the progress of art, and prevent those attempts, by which alone perfection must (if ever) be obtained. For what is perfection, but the complete union of all parts of the art, and, if they are incompatible, what have we to hope for?

But the Carracci do not stand in need of arguments in behalf of their principles, while such a work exists, as that (which all must remember!) of *The three Marys weeping over the Body of Christ*; in which are actually combined the excellencies of drawing, chiaro scuro, colouring, composition, and expression, each to a degree which we have seldom seen surpassed; and, had it possessed a corresponding dignity and beauty of character, I should not hesitate to place it at least on a level with the first productions of modern art.

This picture alone sufficiently justifies the rationality of those gigantic attempts which, had they been completely successful, would have involved the names of the proudest predecessors of the Carracci in comparative obscurity: this answers all objections to their plan, affords a complete

evidence of its practicability, and warrants the hope of its being, at some future period, carried more effectually into execution.

The deep-toned sobriety of the Carracci was quickly followed by the meteor-like glare of Caravaggio, who, from love of novelty, or an insatiable desire of force, too frequently disjointed his compositions, separated every spot of light by intense shadow, plunged at every step from noon-day to midnight, and, instead of *conducting*, tore his *chiaro scuro* to rags: *his*, indeed, is not so properly *chiaro scuro*, as light and shadow run mad.

By his want of connecting demi-tints and reflected lights, and total neglect of every kind of gradation, he missed all the unity, harmony and grace, so delightful in Correggio. Hence, though he undoubtedly possessed great force, great boldness of penciling, and freshness and truth of colour, he cannot, except in very particular subjects, be safely recommended as an object for imitation. He has, nevertheless, in his happier moments, produced works of very considerable merit. His *Entombing of Christ*, for instance, now in the Museum at Paris, for *chiaro scuro* and composition, as well as the excellencies above mentioned, may challenge comparison with most of the productions of the Carracci; and no story was ever more happily told on canvass, than that of his *Gamesters cheating a young Man at Cards*. Innocent cullibility on one part, and

brutality and cunning on the other, cannot be more forcibly expressed; each face is a volume, in which the whole history of the man, past, present, and future, is written in legible and indelible characters.

It must be understood, that the great fault of Caravaggio is the want of connecting gradation, and not the depth of his shadows, without which, on a flat surface, what relief or projection can be obtained? Sir Joshua Reynolds justly blames his immediate predecessors, and youthful contemporaries, for a mawkish insipidity, chiefly owing to a timid deficiency of shadow, of which, both by precept and example, he recommends the liberal use, as also of colours vividly and distinctly opposed to each other, and justifies himself by an appeal to the works of the greatest masters, in which there is generally found, in every picture, a part as light, and a part as dark, as possible. As a general rule, Sir Joshua's advice is undoubtedly excellent; but it is not necessary, like Bottom in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Caravaggio, to play the tyrant, and make all split on every occasion. On the contrary, subjects will sometimes occur, that admit, nay, that require, a very different practice. An instance of this kind will readily present itself to the memory of every one who has seen the picture of the Deluge by Poussin. In this work there appears neither white nor black, nor blue, nor red, nor yellow: the whole mass is, with little variation, of

a sombre gray, the true resemblance of a dark and humid atmosphere, by which every object is rendered indistinct and almost colourless. This is both a faithful and a poetical conception of the subject; nature seems faint, half dissolved, and verging on annihilation, and the pathetic solemnity, grandeur, and simplicity of the effect, which can never be exceeded, is entirely derived from the painter's having judiciously departed from, and gone in direct opposition to, general practice.

That there is no rule without an exception, is proverbially true; and, far from contradicting it in regard to painting, I am inclined to believe, that every subject, if properly treated, would require some deviation from the established laws; some license, some appropriate management peculiar to itself; such as we see exemplified in the *Notte*, by Correggio, and the *Deluge* by Poussin. Till something of this kind happens, we may conclude, the subject has not been perfectly conceived, and is open for further trials; but, when the blow has once been thus happily struck, there is nothing left for followers but humble imitation. The style of Caravaggio astonished by its boldness, delighted by its novelty, and, for a time, produced many imitators, among whom we may reckon the celebrated names of Guido Reni, and Guercino da Cento, who, though they softened somewhat the hardness of his *chiaro scuro*, never equalled him in the freshness and clearness of his colouring.



Guido, indeed, finding himself unequal to his model, soon quitted the style altogether, and adopted another in perfect opposition, which, though a better vehicle for mannered beauty and theatric grace, was as far removed by its flimsiness from true taste, as was that of Caravaggio by its outrageous strength.

The nature of my subject requires that I should follow the art from Italy into Holland, where, though its revival cannot by any means be said to be complete, the branch of which I am now treating, as also some others, was carried to a perfection highly deserving notice.

To the Dutch school, all that has been said of the Venetian applies with double and treble force. Ugliness was beauty to them. They not only did not seek what was grand, elevated, and perfect, but studiously avoided it, and climbing downwards with an inverted taste, seemed to delight in baseness and deformity, and to make them objects of preference. In their histories, they sacrificed without mercy all decorum, all propriety, all regard to costume, all beauty, truth, and grandeur of character. Gods, emperors, heroes, sages, and beauties, were all taken out of the same pot, and metamorphosed by one stroke of the pencil into Dutchmen. Noah was only the first skipper, and Abraham a fat burgomaster of Amsterdam.

Yet, in spite of meanness and disproportion, in spite of

their neglect of some rules, and their ignorance and open defiance of others,—how vain is judgement, criticism how weak!—they have produced works, which the purest sensibility and the most refined taste cannot reject, which the best cultivated eye dwells on with pleasure, and by which we are, for a moment at least, compelled to forget, that the art has any thing of a higher class to bestow!

There are, indeed, shallow and supereilious critics, without comprehension to take in the whole of art, without judgement to discern all the ends proposed by it, and without taste to relish every kind of excellence—who, with a morbid appetite, rejecting what is offered, constantly sigh for all that is absent, and, with eager solicitude to be displeased, always dwell on defects and improprieties—who see only Raffaello's want of colour, Titian's want of form, Correggio's want of expression, and Rubens's want of grace;—such, ever ready to flatter themselves into the belief that they possess exquisite taste and refined judgement, will, doubtless, think the Dutch school altogether beneath their notice; but, hazardous as it may be, I will venture to say, that such an opinion can only be pronounced by those whose judgement is depraved, and who are totally devoid of taste. True critics, who exercise the rod not from vanity but from taste, not from malice but affection, who can discover and discriminate beauties from defects, however unhappily they may be mingled,

will readily allow the claims of the Dutch artists to considerable praise.

At the head of the Dutch school, and foremost amongst those who, in the opinion of some critics, cut the knot instead of untying it, and burglariously entered the Temple of Fame by the window, stands the name of Rembrandt, called *Van Rhyn* from his birth place, a village on that river near Leyden. His father, a miller, put his son under one Lastman, a tolerable painter of Amsterdam; but by what means he was led to adopt that peculiar manner which distinguishes his works, is not now to be discovered. Of his singularities it is, however, recorded that he used to ridicule the antique, and the ordinary methods of study, and that he had a large collection of strange dresses, old armour, and rich stuffs, which he called his antiques, and which it is obvious he made use of, as models in his principal works. There is, also, a story related of him, which shows him to have been no less a humorist than a genius; which is, that finding his works, at one period of his life, accumulating on his hands, he resolved to make a sale of them, but unfortunately, it seems, the public in Rembrandt's time very much resembled the public at present, and scorned to buy the works of a *living* artist. In this dilemma he had no resource but to secrete himself, pretend to be dead, put his wife into widow's mourning, and order a mock funeral. After this, his sale went on

with uncommon success: when it was ended Rembrandt rose from the dead, to the great joy of his disconsolate wife, and received the congratulations of his friends on the happy termination of his excellent joke. Being, at another time, reproached for the boldness and roughness of his manner of laying on his colours, he replied, "I am a painter, and not a dyer."

What was so happily said of Burke, might with equal truth be applied to Rembrandt:

" Whose genius was such  
That one never can praise it, or blame it, too much."

He seemed born to confound all rules and reasoning: with the most transcendent merits he combines the most glaring faults, and reconciles us to them; he charms without beauty, interests without grace, and is sublime in spite of disgusting forms and the utmost vulgarity of character. His deficiencies would have fairly annihilated any other man, yet he still justly claims to be considered as a genius of the first class. Of *chiaro scuro* he ranged the whole extent, and exemplified all its effects in all its degrees, changes, and harmonies, from the noon-day blaze to when the

" Dying embers round the room  
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom."

In richness and truth of colouring, in copiousness of invention and energy of expression, he equalled the greatest of his predecessors, and whatever he attempted, he rendered with a degree of truth, of reality, of illusion, that defies all comparison. By these powers he seemed to be independent of his subject: it mattered not what he painted, his pencil, like the finger of Midas, turned every thing it touched to gold; it made defects agreeable, gave importance to trifles, and begat interest in the bosom of barrenness and insipidity itself.

But, though thus gifted to dwell with nature in her simplest retirement, he was no less qualified, with a master's hand and poet's fire, to follow and arrest her in her wildest flights; all that was great, striking, and uncommon in her scenery, was familiar to him; yet he chiefly delighted in obscurity and repose; mystery and silence floated round his pencil, and dreams, visions, witcheries, and incantations he alone, with no less magic power, rendered probable, awful, and interesting. In short, so great and original were his powers, that he seems to be one, who would have discovered the art, had it never before existed.

Rembrandt, with all his powers, is a master whom it is most exceedingly dangerous to imitate; his excellencies are so fascinating, that we are apt first to forgive, and, lastly, to fall in love even with his faults, or, at least, to think

the former cheaply purchased with the incumbrance of the latter. But let the student carefully remember, that the imitator of any individual master, like the imitator of individual nature, must never hope to occupy a station in the first class of artists; and that defects like those of Rembrandt, and most of the Dutch school, even if associated with equal excellence, can never hope to be forgiven a second time.



# LECTURE IV.

READ AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

*March 9, 1807.*





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**I** SHALL, this evening, proceed to the consideration of colouring, the third part of painting, which, though confessedly of inferior consequence to design and chiaro scuro, must yet be deemed sufficiently important to occupy a large share of the attention of an artist, who wishes to give a correct and an agreeable representation of nature. Hence it may be thought necessary, that he should study the laws of optics, be intimately acquainted with all the phænomena of the reflection and réfraction of light, of its composition, and divisibility into red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, and violet-coloured rays, and that he should examine into the nature of the surfaces and textures of different bodies, by which they absorb, divide,

transmit, or reflect light, and consequently give birth to that astonishing variety of hues, under which they are exhibited to the eye.

These are studies, which, doubtless, ought not to be altogether discouraged; for, not to speak of the pleasure, that must result to the artist, from his being able truly and solidly to account for all the various appearances of light, he cannot, of course, be too well acquainted with the nature and properties of those colours, by whose instrumentality he is to give life and energy to his future designs. But it cannot be improper to inform him, that too much stress may easily be laid on knowledge of this kind; Titian, Rubens, and Vandyck probably knew nothing of the divisibility of light, and little more, perhaps, of the laws of optics, than what must necessarily result from practice; and it must reluctantly be confessed, that the rest is but remotely connected with the art, and that the discoveries of Newton and Berkeley, however sublime and beautiful, are but little calculated to assist the production of the sublime and beautiful in painting.

If poets, of all times, have considered colour as one of the chief beauties in nature, it can be no wonder that painters should delight in it, and be too often inclined to overrate its importance. From a conviction of this general tendency it is, that the united voices of all teachers are lifted against the fascinating charms of this Cleopatra of

the art, for which hundreds "have lost the world, and been content to lose it."

Colouring, says a great critic, if once attained in a high degree, generally disdains subordination, and engrosses the whole attention. Those who have once gained supreme dominion over the eye, will hardly resign it to court the more coy approbation of the mind—the approbation of a few, opposed to the admiration of all! Poussin thinks that colouring needs little attention, and that practice alone will give a reasonable proficiency in it. Annibal Carracci delivered it as his opinion, that almost the whole art consisted in a good outline; and Sir Joshua Reynolds, the slave and master of colouring, to gain which he almost lost himself, though sedulously devoted to it in practice, seems, in his writings, to consider it as rather detrimental, if not incompatible with sentiment and the grand style of art.

The judgements of those, who have failed in their attempts to colour, like the fox's judgement in grapes, may reasonably be suspected of proceeding from sinister motives; but the judgement of him, who, from his superlative excellence in that branch, might boldly challenge comparison with the greatest masters, claims to be considered with all possible respect and attention. It is not, therefore, without some alarm, that I feel myself compelled to oppose his opinion, which to me appears not to be founded

on a clear perception of any thing, in the nature of colouring, repugnant to expression, character, and sentiment, but rather drawn from the flagrant abuse of it by the Venetian and Flemish painters, and a supposition that the deficiency of it in the works of the Romans and Florentines was not owing to incapacity, but to their rejection of its blandishments, on a conviction of their interfering with, or destroying the effect of, those excellences, to which they were more immediately desirous of paying attention. This is so far from being the case, that Michael Angelo, it is well known, was exceedingly charmed by Titian's colouring, and very solicitous of joining, through the means of Sebastian del Piombo, the Venetian manner of painting to his own grand style of design; and Raffaele, who panted after perfection, put himself under Fra Bartolomeo for the express purpose of studying colouring, wishing to add to his already magnificent *stock of merits*, all those necessary to produce that *truth* and *illusion*, so agreeable in the works of many comparatively inferior *masters*. Hence I am convinced, that, far from considering it as detrimental, they thought it indispensable to perfection. And the authority of the ancients, which, in regard to matters of taste, must be considered as little short of revelation, is also evidently in favour of this opinion; since we find that, amongst the Greeks, Zeuxis, Parrhasius, and Apelles, their most famous painters, were also the most excellent

colourists: and, if we examine the inordinate praises bestowed on the last and greatest of the three, it will be found to turn chiefly on the beauty of his colouring; the famous Coan Venus, painted by him, was the admiration of every succeeding age, till the time of Cicero, who marks its perfection in colour, as approaching the truth, softness, and warmth of real flesh and blood. The same artist, after this, attempted a second Venus, which was to have exceeded all his former productions; but dying before he had executed more than the head and breasts, no painter, we are told, (such was its superlative excellence,) could be prevailed on to attempt its completion. Now, as we must suppose, in this case, that the idea, character, and style of design, were determined, it seems to follow, that what the artists dreaded in particular was a comparison of their *colouring* with the truly inimitable beauty of his. Pliny, also, tells us of a Warrior painted by him, which challenged nature itself; and Propertius pays him a most elegant compliment, and at the same time gives us the most perfect notion of his extraordinary merit, when, dissuading his mistress from the use of paint, he advises her to trust to her real complexion, which he compares to the native carnations of Apelles. By the great praises lavished on the colouring of Apelles, it must not be inferred that he was deficient in other parts of the art; the age, in which he lived, was distinguished above all others, which

preceded or came after it, for the utmost perfection in design. A weakness therefore of the first painter, in the first branch of the art, could not possibly have been passed over unnoticed and uncensured. There is, indeed, the best reason for supposing him, in nearly all parts of the art, equal, and, in most, superior to any artist of his time: His character, therefore, may very properly be recommended to the consideration of those sanguine admirers of the Florentine and Roman schools, those greensick lovers of chalk, brickdust, charcoal, and old tapestry, who are so ready to decry the merits of colouring, and to set it down as a kind of superfluity in art.

The grand style consists, not in neglecting to give all the apparent truth, force, and reality of objects to the eye, but in supplying the defects, and avoiding the redundancies of individual and imperfect forms; and colouring is not less capable, by rejecting what is merely accidental, and copying only the general and characteristic hue of each object, of being elevated to the same ideal standard. By this simple and refined principle, operating equally in all parts of the art, the ancients carried it at last to such perfection, that nature "toiled after it in vain." Propertius, as we see by the foregoing compliment, made it a merit in her to rise to a competition with painting, in respect to colour; and the poets and orators, when they wished to give the highest possible idea of personal beauty,

always had recourse, for a comparison, to the works of the statuary. Thus Ovid, speaking of Cyllarus, the fairest of the Centaurs, celebrates him as vying in perfection with the most admirable statues :

“ A pleasing vigour his fair face express'd ;  
His neck, his hands, his shoulders and his breast  
Did next in gracefulness and beauty stand  
To breathing figures of the sculptor's hand.”

For these reasons, though no one can be a greater admirer, I might say adorer, of the works of Michael Angelo, and Raffaello, than myself, I confess I can no longer consider them as improved by defect: I will not believe that

“ Half their beauties to their spots we owe.”

But, great as they were in design, invention, and expression, as colouring is capable of a corresponding elevation of character, and has often been made equally a vehicle of sentiment, I cannot but suppose that their merits would have been considerably augmented by the addition of beautiful and appropriate colour.

But, in thus protesting against the neglect of colouring, I would by no means be considered as giving a sanction to the abuse of it. Let me, therefore, caution the student against that vulgar error, the mistaking fine colours for fine colouring, which consists, not in the gaudiness, but



the truth, harmony, and transparency of the tints, and the depth of the tones. Let him beware of being captivated by the ostentatious splendour of the Venetian and Flemish schools; the terrors of the Crucifixion must not be lost in the magnificent pomp of a triumphal show, nor the pathetic solemnity of the Last Supper be disturbed by the impertinent gaiety of a bacchanalian revel. This is abhorrent to true taste; nor shall the authors of such mockeries escape censure, however great their powers or celebrated their names.

Colour, the peculiar object of the most delightful of our senses, is associated in our minds with all that is rare, precious, delicate, and magnificent in nature. A fine complexion, in the language of the poet, is the dye of love, a hint of something celestial: the ruby, the rose, the diamond, the youthful blush, the orient morning, and the variegated splendour of the setting sun, consist of, or owe their charms principally to, colour. To the sight it is the index of gaiety, richness, warmth, and animation; and should the most experienced artist, by design alone, attempt to represent the tender freshness of spring, the fervid vivacity of summer, or the mellow abundance of autumn, what must be his success? Colouring is the sunshine of the art, that clothes poverty in smiles, and renders the prospect of barrenness itself agreeable, while it heightens the interest, and doubles the charms of beauty.

However proper, therefore, it may be to place colouring in a subordinate rank to design, when we consider its various beauties, uses and effects in the art, it will be found no easy task to do it justice. He that would excel in it, must study it in several points of view, in respect to the whole, and in respect to the parts of a picture, in respect to mind and in respect to body, and in regard to itself alone. Like sound in poetry, colouring, in painting, should always be an echo to the sense. The true colourist, therefore, will always, in the first place, consider the nature of his subject, whether grave or gay, magnificent or melancholy, heroic or common; and, according to the time and place, whether his scene he intended to represent day or night, sunshine or gloom, a cavern, a prison, a palace, or the open air, such will be the predominant hues of his piece. Colour must also be employed to harmonize, invigorate, soften, and aid his *chiaro scuro*, in giving shape and unity to the masses of brightness and obscurity, necessary to bring out a striking and an agreeable general effect, and in distinguishing by their depth, strength, or brilliancy, the principal and subordinate figures, groups, and actions of the piece, each in its proper degree; by which the eye is enabled to rest undisturbed on any separate part, to travel undistracted over each in succession, or, by fixing at once on the principal object, to enjoy the full and united impression of the whole.

In regard to the parts of a picture, it will not only be necessary that every individual object should properly cooperate in the general effect, but that each should likewise be properly distinguished from all others. It will be useful to the artist, therefore, to study the associations of colour with our ideas of character. *White*, the symbol of innocence, and the tender tints of spring analogous to the opening of human life, become the proper decoration and accompaniment of childhood and youth; greater strength and vivacity of colour suit a riper age; and thus, advancing through every gradation of richness and depth, till we come to "*black, staid wisdom's hue*," every actor that enters on his scene, the young, the old, the male, the female, the slave, the hero, the magistrate, the prince, and the philosopher; in short, all stages of humanity, from the infant mewling in his nurse's arms to the decrepitude of second childishness, will derive from the freshness, brilliancy, harmony, force, gravity, or sombreness of his tints, its characteristic colour and shade of difference, both in regard to complexion and dress, the essence and the accident.

Colour not only pleases by its thousand delicate hues and harmonious gradations, but serves in nature, and must be employed in art, to characterize and distinguish the various qualities and textures of different bodies and surfaces, as the tenderness and warmth of flesh, the hardness of stone, the polish of metals, the richness of velvet,

and the transparency of glass, in all their varied situations of light, shade, or reflected light, and of proximity to, or distance from, the eye. Nor is its operation merely physical, and confined to body : every passion and affection of the human mind has its appropriate *tint*, and colouring, if properly adapted, lends its aid, with powerful effect, in the just discrimination and forcible expression of them ; it heightens joy, warms love, inflames anger, deepens sadness, and adds coldness to the cheek of death itself.

The arrangement of colours, another important point, must be regulated by laws similar to those laid down respecting the management of light and shadow ; they should each have a principal, and a few other subordinate masses of unequal sizes and irregular shapes, unless the subject expressly demands the contrary. This will be following the common course of nature, which always tends to variety, inequality, and irregularity, except there is some specific purpose to be answered by a different mode of arrangement. It will also be found to correspond with the practice of the most approved masters in colouring ; and those who are much conversant with pictures will easily recollect instances, where the painter, having been under the necessity of laying in one place a large mass of a particular colour, has, by the introduction of bunches of flowers, pieces of drapery, or other objects, contrived to disseminate smaller masses of a similar colour in other

parts of the picture, to keep up a due balance and harmony throughout the whole.

He that has attended to all this, has done much, but much yet remains to be done. It has often been remarked, that colours are to the eye, what flavours are to the palate, and sounds to the ear; and, as music should not only be well composed, and played in time and in tune, but the tones also of the voices and instruments should be touching and agreeable; so, in painting, the colours should not only be applied properly, and arranged with judgment and taste, but they should also be capable of affording pleasure by their own intrinsic beauty, by their brilliancy, freshness, harmony and transparency: these constitute the essence and exquisite flavour of colouring; and, though many painters are unquestionably highly censurable for the absurdities and improprieties into which they have run to *gain* them, it cannot be denied that they ought to obtain in all subjects, in order to render the imitation of nature complete, and perfectly agreeable.

Colour being, exclusively and solely, an object of sight, must obviously be less under the power of language, than almost any other part of the art. The student, however, may be told that the freshness and brilliancy of colours depend, in a great measure, on their purity, that is, on keeping them as little mixed together, as little muddled by vehicles and subsequent attempts to mend the first

touches, as the power of the artist and the nature of the subject will admit of; and the brilliancy may be still further increased, by judiciously contrasting them with their opposites. Red, for instance, will have a more lively effect in the neighbourhood of blue; and yellow, opposed to purple. White will increase in vivacity by being near black, and black will appear more intense, if placed on a ground of white. Laying them also in situations admitting of instantaneous comparison, is another mode of heightening the apparent vivacity of colours. The ill-looking may appear well-favoured, if accompanied by those that are worse: thus, a moderately lively red, or yellow, will appear brilliant, if surrounded by others of the same class, but of a more depraved quality. Richness and transparency may be obtained by glazing, and passing the colours one over another without suffering them to mix; and harmony is secured by keeping up the same tone through the whole, and not at all by any sort of arrangement, as some have erroneously supposed. These circumstances will be plain and intelligible to all, who are a little initiated in the theory and management of colours; but they will also find, to their sorrow, that brilliancy and freshness may easily be pushed into rawness and crudeness; that transparency may easily degenerate into flimsiness and want of solidity; that harmony easily slides into jaundice and

muddiness ; that spirit and cleanness of touch quickly run into hardness, and softness into woolliness and want of precision:—and, between these almost meeting extremes, who shall tell them when and where to stop? This is altogether beyond the power of words, and is attainable only by a good organ, long practice, and the study of nature and the best masters.

In studying and copying the works of old and celebrated masters, it is proper, however, that the student should never lose sight of one circumstance, *which is*, that they are often, if not always, so changed by time, dust, and varnish, that it is necessary to consider, rather what they once were, than what they are at present. He must acquire the power of seeing the brilliancy of their tints through the cloud by which it is obscured : otherwise he will be likely to imbibe false notions on the subject, and become a colourist of his own formation, with ideas equally remote from nature and from art, from the genuine practice of the masters and the real appearances of things. It would be as tedious as useless, to enter here into a detail of the various materials used in painting, and the different modes of applying them, the proper knowledge of which it is the province of experiment and practice alone to teach. Suffice it to say, that the genuine principles of colouring are the same in all, and that, under skilful

management, they are all capable of producing admirable effects; but, though every student may safely be left to his own choice of his vehicles and instruments, it is highly necessary to caution him against any undue reliance on them, and to remark, that much imposition and quackery has at all times prevailed in respect to this comparatively insignificant part of the art.

Not long since, we were astonished by the proposals of a very young lady, scarce in her teens, for unveiling her Venetian secret, and teaching Royal Academicians to colour, at five guineas a-head; by which young and old, learned and unlearned, were equally captivated, and the grave biographer of our illustrious first president so dazzled, as to lament most piteously that great man's misfortune, in being cut off, before he had had an opportunity of purchasing her inestimable and cheaply proffered favours. At another time, still more wonderful receipts are announced for making Titians and Correggios by a chemical process, and every day some new graphic Dr. Graham or Brodum, with a confidence that stupifies common sense, and dares incredulity to silence, bursts upon us, and boasts the infallibility of his nostrums for producing fine pictures without the help of science, genius, taste, or industry. Oil, water, varnish, gums, wool, worsted, pokers, chalk, charcoal, and brick-dust,



have each their several champions, who triumph and fall by turns :

“ Thus have I seen, engaged in mortal fight,  
A sturdy barber beat a collier white ;  
In comes the brickdust-man with grime bespread,  
And beats the collier and the barber red.”

All which might well be laughed at, if it had not the mischievous effect of diverting the student's attention from the end to the means, disposing him to the worst kind of idleness, and filling his head with a farrago, as pernicious and nugatory as the pursuit of the philosopher's stone, or the perpetual motion ; and as little connected with the real essence of painting as writing with red or black ink, or upon crown, double elephant, or foolscap paper, is with that of poetry.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his admirable Discourses, seems particularly anxious to guard the young practitioner against such vain pretenders and wonder-mongers, by exposing the danger of his fancying the art to consist of any thing like the tricks of a juggler, or imagining that excellence is to be obtained any otherwise than by incessant practice and well-directed study. “ Labour,” says he, quoting from the ancients, “ is the price which the gods have set upon every thing truly valuable.”

In allusion to the uses and effects of colouring, when

applied properly, that is, in assistance, and not to the exclusion, of other excellencies, Fresnoy not improperly calls it the handmaid of her sister Design, for whom she procures lovers by dressing, painting, ornamenting and making her appear more bewitching than she naturally is; and thus, as Dryden observes in his parallel betwixt poetry and painting, it is the versification, tropes, figures, and other elegancies of language and expression, *the colouring of poetry*, that charm the reader and beautify the fable or design; but, in both arts, if the latter be mean or vicious, the cost of language and colouring will be wholly thrown away, like a rich habit, jewels, and other finery, on an ordinary woman, which, instead of rendering her charming, only tend to illuminate and draw her defects more strongly into notice, making what was in itself bad, appear ten times worse by comparison.

Colouring being to superficial observers one half of painting, and that the most attractive, it has perhaps, in all parts of the world, been nearly coeval with Design. The Florentine artists studied and practised it from the earliest time, but apparently with a success by no means answerable to their efforts. Ignorant of the principles of *chiaro scuro*, their utmost exertions could never have enabled them to do more than rival the king of diamonds. It is unnecessary, therefore, to trace the history of colouring further back than the latter end of the fifteenth century, when its true birth

seems to have taken place at Venice:—at least, there the rudiments of all that makes it valuable and agreeable, appear to have been invented by Giorgione, of whom I have spoken in a former Lecture, and there they were first successfully cultivated and brought to perfection by Titiano da Cadore.

Without meaning to detract any thing from the unquestionable merits of these great men, I cannot but observe, that this extraordinary change and improvement in the style of colouring, must in part, also, have been owing to the introduction of oil-painting from Flanders, which took place about the period mentioned, and in time entirely superseded the more ancient practice of painting in fresco or water-colours; a method which, notwithstanding some advantages in respect to freshness and facility, totally precludes the possibility of producing the depth of tone, transparency, force, mellowness and finish, attainable by painting in oil.

Titian, whose name, like that of Apelles of old, is now synonymous with all that is exquisite in colour, was born about the year 1480, and, discovering at an early age a strong propensity to painting, was placed, when ten or eleven years old, under the tuition of Gian. Bellino, at that time a painter of eminence at Venice, but whose stiff, ungraceful style of design and flat meagre manner of colouring were little calculated to develop and forward

the first-rate powers of his pupil. Happily, however, about the year 1507, Giorgione, being arrived at Venice from Florence and Leonardo da Vinci, Titian was so warmed and captivated by the unusual boldness and richness of his style, that, immediately turning out of doors all that he had learned in the school of Bellino, he began afresh; and such was the assiduity with which he applied himself to the study and practice of the new manner, that, from the humble imitator, he very soon became the successful rival of Giorgione, nay more, his master; for, being employed, jointly with Giorgione, in the decoration of a palace at Venice, the latter was complimented by his friends, who were ignorant of the partnership, on the part that was painted by Titian, in which they told him he had perfectly outdone himself. This unlucky praise so shocked Giorgione, that, leaving the work unfinished, he for some days hid himself in his house, and from that time forswore all friendship and acquaintance with Titian, who, in the sequel, seems to have excelled Giorgione as much in jealousy as in painting; for he is said, some years afterwards, to have barricaded his doors against Paris Bourdon, from very ill-founded fears of experiencing from that painter the same disagreeable effects which Giorgione had felt from his.

Like Michael Angelo in design, Titian, in colouring, may be regarded as the father of modern art. He first discovered and unfolded all its charms, saw the true end of imitation, shewed what to aim at, when to labour,

and where to stop; and *united breadth and softness* to the *proper degree of finishing*. He first dared all its depths, contrasted all its oppositions, and taught colour to glow and palpitate with all the warmth and *tenderness of real life*: free from tiresome detail, or disgusting minutiae, he rendered the roses and lilies of youth, the more ensanguined brown of manhood, and the pallid coldness of age, with truth and precision; and to every material object, hard or soft, rough or smooth, bright or obscure, opaque or transparent, his pencil imparted its true quality and appearance to the eye, with all the force and harmony of light, shade, middle tint, and reflexion; by which he so relieved, rounded, and connected the whole, that we are almost irresistibly tempted to apply the test of another sense, and exclaim,

“ Art thou not, pleasing vision! sensible  
To feeling as to sight?”

Though gifted with a perfect knowledge of all the qualities and powers of colour, he never overstepped the modesty of nature, and made that ostentatious and meretricious use of it, so censurable in many of his followers. In his works, it is modest without heaviness, rich without glaring, and transparent without flimsiness: like a great orator, he never sacrifices the end to the means, subjugates sense to sound, or diverts the attention of the spectator from the subject to himself.

At an early period, he mounted the throne of portrait-

painting, where, in the opinion of many, he still keeps his seat, unshaken, notwithstanding the violent attacks made on him at different periods by Vandyck, Rembrandt, and Reynolds. He combines resemblance with dignity, *costume* with taste, and art with simplicity; and equally delights the physiognomist, the artist, the antiquary, and the connoisseur. He was the inventor of all that is simple and captivating, or sublime and energetic, in landscape; and, in short, his powers changed the whole appearance, and still continue to influence the style of modern colouring;—for where is the painter, since his time, who has been exempted by grandeur or littleness, by genius or stupidity, from the necessity of imitating the works of Titian? To him, we are, in some measure, indebted for the daring vivacity of Tintoretto, the freshness of Veronese, the strength of Carracci, the glowing splendour of Rubens, the truth of Rembrandt, and the taste of Vandyck. Justly, therefore, was it said of him by Michael Angelo, that, had he been a correct designer, he would have been the first painter that ever existed.

Titian, like his contemporaries, began his career by merely copying nature, as she happened to present herself, without choice or selection, and laboured, for a time, in the labyrinth of littleness, meanness, and deformity; but a hint from Giorgione soon taught him, that taste was as requisite as industry, that labour might be mis-

applied, and truth itself become uninteresting, unnatural, and disgusting; that hairs, pores, pimples, warts, stains, freckles, and all the train of nauseous minutiae, on which inferior artists waste their puny powers, are incompatible with the true end of imitation; that the detail must be sunk in the essential and predominant qualities of bodies; and that the business of painting, like that of poetry, is not to give a feeble catalogue of particulars, but a characteristic, comprehensive, and animated impression of the whole. By the operation of this principle, extended from the parts to the individual, from the individual to the group, and thence to the entire mass of his composition, he reached the last and greatest excellence of colouring, that of giving the ruling passion or sentiment of his subject, in the prevailing tone or predominant hue of his piece.

From Titian we may learn what may be usefully applied, not only to ourselves, but to men in all situations and of all professions, as well as to painters; that *it is never too late to improve*;—for, at the age of seventy, and considerably upwards, we find him still rapidly advancing in his art. He had, it is true, at an early period, acquired breadth and grandeur in respect to colour, but he was not so happy as to burst the shackles of meanness, and emancipate himself from littleness, in respect to design, character, and invention, till very late in life. All obstacles, however, at length gave way to his powers and perseverance,

and his latter works are not only remarkable for the most truly historic and awful tones of colour, for a freedom and felicity of execution beyond even the great promise of his former time, but also for a picturesque boldness and sublimity of conception, an energy of action and expression, and a learned and grand style of design, second to none but Michael Angelo. Those, therefore, who have seen the majestic figure of his Abraham about to offer up Isaac, his Cain and Abel, his David adoring over the headless trunk of Goliath, and his astonishing picture of the Death of Peter the Martyr, in which there is very nearly a complete union of all the excellencies of the art, will judge of the infinite importance of appropriate colour and execution to design, and be ready to cry out, with a certain critic, that "if Titian was not the greatest painter, he certainly produced the best pictures in the world." Nature and fortune were equally kind to Titian: he had not to complain of having fallen on evil days, and evil tongues; he was not suffered to waste his sweetness on the desert air; his works, sought for with avidity, even in his lifetime, made their way, without the aid of time, dust, or varnish, unscraped, unmended, and unsmoked, into the halls of the opulent, the palaces of the great, and the temples of the Deity; and, what is still more extraordinary, he was, himself, not forbidden to accompany them; his fame as a portrait painter procured him pressing invitations to attend



every principal court in Europe, all being desirous to be delivered down to posterity, or, as it was forcibly expressed by Charles V, of being rendered immortal, by the hand of Titian. He several times painted the portrait of that emperor, and once, it is said, whilst at work, having dropped a pencil, Charles stooped for it, gave it him, and, on Titian's apologizing with some confusion, said very courteously, "*Titian is worthy of being served by an emperor.*" Charles also conferred on him the dignities of a knight, and count palatine, and allowed him a liberal pension; at which finding his courtiers beginning to express their envy and dissatisfaction, he plainly told them, as a reason for his bounty, and to mortify their malice, that he could, at any time, make as many nobles as he pleased, but that, with all his power, he could never make a Titian.

Thus honoured by the great, and his society courted by all the eminent men of his time, Titian was not more happy in his genius, than in all the circumstances of his life, which, prolonged to an almost patriarchal extent, in uninterrupted health, and with little abatement of vigour, was brought at last to a period by the plague, at the end of ninety-nine years.

Of the numerous followers of Titian, the principal names are those of Tintoretto, and Paolo Veronese, who possessed the full powers of their master, perhaps even greater,

in execution and colouring, but who fall infinitely beneath him in judgement and delicacy of taste. "Of all the extraordinary geniuses," says Vasari, "who have practised the art of painting, for wild, capricious, extravagant and fantastical inventions, for furious impetuosity and boldness in the execution of his works, there is none like Tintoretto; his strange whimsies are even beyond extravagance, and his works seem to be produced rather by chance than in consequence of any previous design; as if he wanted to convince the world that the art was a trifle of the most easy attainment." This criticism, though much too violent and severe in the main, as might be expected from a Florentine biographer, is not wholly inapplicable to all the Venetian painters, Titian alone excepted; for, in their works, it cannot be denied that we look in vain for that depth of thought, and those comprehensive and elevated views of nature, which dignify the productions of Rome and Florence; their subjects are, in general, treated without regard to propriety of character, historic truth, or the decorum and simplicity due to sacred and allegoric representation; and it is evident they considered the art, as consisting of little more than those second-rate excellencies, which so eminently characterize their own school. Hence, their grandest compositions seldom offer us any thing but important events, disgraced by mean and uncharacteristic agents, and vul-

garized by the introduction of puerile and ridiculous circumstances :—

“ What should be great they turn to farce ! ”

Every thing appears to be burlesqued—put in the wrong place, or called by a wrong name.—We have portrait for history—Turks’ heads for Apostles’—and Jews for Pagans. Fat, smirking damsels, (the painters’ mistresses or those of their friends,) flaunting and bridling in all the tawdry dresses and fashionable airs of the time,—are indiscriminately christened *Holy Virgins*—*Pharaoh’s daughters*—*Judiths*, *Rebeccas*, and *Cleopatras* ; and *black* boys, *dwarfs*, *dogs* gnawing bones, cats, and monkeys, are not seldom obtruded on the spectator, on the most solemn occasions, as the principal objects in the piece !!!

“ The things we know are neither rich nor rare,  
But wonder how the devil they got there ! ”

With all these defects, such are the powers displayed in their works, that many of those of a confessedly higher character would suffer considerably by being brought into comparison with them. It is to no purpose, that we know this effect ought not to take place ; the eye is enthralled, and the understanding struggles in vain against the glowing harmony of their colouring, the illusive vivacity of their imagery, and the sweeping rapidity of their execution,

which, like the force of eloquence, bear down all before them, and often triumph over superior learning and truth.

But though their style, in general, was properly calculated only for occasions of gaiety, frivolity, and magnificence, they were not always unsuccessful in subjects of the grand and tragic kind. In the famous picture of the Crucifixion, by Tintoretto, *the ominous, terrific, and ensanguined hue of the whole*, THE DISASTROUS TWILIGHT, that indicates some *more* than mortal suffering, electrifies the spectator at the first glance, and is such an instance of the powerful application of colouring to expression, as has probably never been exceeded, except by Rembrandt, in the bloodless, heart-appalling hue, spread over his Belshazzar's Vision of the Hand-writing on the Wall.

Built on the same principles, and partaking of the same beauties and defects as the Venetian, the Flemish school next demands our attention in regard to colouring; in which, if it is inferior to the former in depth, richness and freshness, it is superior in vivacity, splendour, and transparency; if it yields in individual truth, it goes beyond in general harmony. In the Venetian, there is perhaps more strength, in the Flemish, more softness: the one may be said to give us the tints of autumn, and the other those of spring or summer.

Peter Paul Rubens, the great luminary and centre of the Flemish system of art, was of a distinguished family

at Antwerp, at that time a school of classical and religious learning, and the emporium of the western world. Here, from his infancy, he was educated, with great care, in every branch of polite literature; and his genius met these advantages with an ardour and success, of which the ordinary course of things furnishes us with no parallel. At the age of nineteen, he seriously applied himself to painting under the tuition of Otho Venius, and, a very few years afterwards, we find him in Italy, possessed of unbounded powers both in the theory and practice of his art, and working more as the rival than the pupil of those masters, whose works had been selected as the objects of his imitation.

Both the number and merits of the works of Rubens, as well as his uncommon success in life, are calculated to excite extraordinary attention: his fame is extended over a large part of the continent without a rival; and it may truly be said, that he has enriched his country, not only by the *magnificent examples of art* which he left, but also by what some may deem a more solid advantage, the wealth which continued, till lately, to be drawn into it by the concourse of strangers from all parts of the world to view them.

To the city of Dusseldorp he has been an equal benefactor, as the celebrated gallery there would at least lose half its value, were his performances alone to be with-

drawn from it. Paris, also, owes to him a large part of its attractions; and, if to these we add the many towns, churches, and private cabinets, whereon a single picture or sketch of Rubens often confers distinction, who shall dispute his legitimate claim to be ranked with the most illustrious names in his profession?

Rubens is not one of those regular and timid composers, who escape censure and deserve no praise. He produces no faultless monsters; his works abound with defects, as well as beauties, and are liable, by their daring eccentricities, to provoke much criticism. But they have, nevertheless, that peculiar property, always the companion of true genius, that which seizes on the spectator, commands attention, and enforces admiration in spite of all their faults. "To the want of this fascinating power," (says Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his Journey through Flanders) "it is owing, that the performances of those painters, by which he is surrounded, such as the altar-pieces of Crayer, Schut, Segers, Huysum, Tyssens, Van Balen, and others, though they have perhaps fewer defects, appear spiritless and insipid in comparison: they are men, whose hands, and indeed all their faculties, appear to be cabined, cribbed, confined; and their performances, however tolerable in some respects, are too evidently the effect of merely careful and laborious diligence."

"The productions of Rubens, on the contrary, seem to

flow from his pencil with more than freedom, with *prodigality*; his mind was inexhaustible, his hand was never wearied; the exuberant fertility of his imagination was, therefore, always accompanied by a correspondent spirit in the execution of his work:

“ Led by some rule which guides but not constrains,  
He finish'd more through happiness than pains.”

No man ever more completely laid the reins on the neck of his inclinations, no man ever more fearlessly abandoned himself to his own sensations, and, depending on them, dared to attempt extraordinary things, than Rubens. To this, in a great measure, must be attributed that perfect originality of manner, by which the limits of the art may be said to be extended. Endowed with a full comprehension of his own character, he waited not a moment for the acquisition of what he perhaps deemed incompatible excellence: his theory once formed, he seldom looked abroad for assistance; there is consequently, in his works, very little that appears to be taken from other masters, and, if he has occasionally stolen any thing, he has so well digested and adapted it to the rest of his composition, that the theft is not discoverable. But, though it must be allowed that he possessed, in many respects, the true art of imitation, though he looked at nature with a true painter's eye, and saw at once the characteristic feature, by which every object is distinguished,

and rendered it at once on canvass with a vivacity of touch truly astonishing; though his powers of grouping and combining his objects into a whole, and forming his masses of light and shade, and colour, have never been equalled; and though the general animation and energy of his attitudes, and the flowing liberty of his outline, all contribute to arrest the attention, and inspire a portion of that enthusiasm by which the painter was absorbed and carried away, yet the spectator will at last awake from the trance, his eyes will cease to be dazzled, and then he will not fail to lament, that such extraordinary powers were so often misapplied, if not entirely cast away; he will inquire why Rubens was content to want so many requisites to the perfection of art, why he paid no greater attention to elegance and correctness of form, to grace, beauty, dignity, and propriety of character,—why every subject, of whatever class, is equally adorned with the gay colours of spring, and every figure in his compositions indiscriminately *fed on roses*. Nor will he, I fear, be satisfied with the ingenious, but surely unfounded apology, that these faults harmonize with his style, and were necessary to its complete uniformity; that his taste in design appears to correspond better with his colouring and composition, than if he had adopted a more correct and refined style of drawing; and that perhaps in painting, as in personal attractions, there is a certain agreement and



correspondence of parts in the whole together, which is often more captivating than mere regular beauty.

Lest these remarks should be thought too severe on this illustrious man, I shall extract from the works of the great critic, so often already quoted, his description of the picture of *The Fallen Angels* by Rubens, now in the gallery at Dusseldorp :—"It is impossible," says Sir Joshua Reynolds, "without having seen this picture, to form an adequate idea of the powers of Rubens. He seems here to have given loose to the most capricious imagination in the attitudes and invention of the falling angels, who are tumbling

" With hideous ruin and combustion, down  
To bottomless perdition."

"If we consider the fruitfulness of invention discovered in this work, or the skill which is shown in composing such an infinite number of figures, or the art in the distribution of the light and shadow, the freedom and facility with which it seems to be performed, and, what is still more extraordinary, the correctness, and admirable taste of drawing, of foreshortened figures in attitudes the most difficult to execute, we must pronounce this picture to be one of the greatest efforts of genius that ever the art of painting has produced."

His universality is another striking trait in the character

of Rubens. In the smallest sketch, the lightness and transparency of his touch, and colour, are no less remarkable than the sweeping rapidity and force of his brush in his largest works; and, in all kinds of subjects, he equally keeps up his wonted superiority. His animals, particularly his lions and horses, are so admirable, that it may be said they were never properly, at least poetically, painted but by him; his portraits rank with the best works of those painters who have made that branch of art their sole study; the same may be said of his landscapes, and, though Claude Lorrain finished more neatly, as became a professor in a particular branch, yet there is such an airiness and facility in the landscapes of Rubens, that a painter would as soon wish to be the author of them, as of those of Claude or any other artist whatever.

Rubens, like Titian, was caressed, honoured, employed, and splendidly rewarded by several crowned heads, and even deputed in a ministerial capacity by the king of Spain, to make confidential overtures to the court of London, where he was knighted by Charles I, and had every possible mark of respect shown to him on account of his unrivalled excellence in his profession. At his return to Flanders, he was honoured with the post of secretary of state, and in that office he continued till his death, which was brought on by the gout at the age of sixty-three. He

is said to have shown the ruling passion strong in death, lamenting to be taken off, just as he began to be able to paint, and understand his art.

He enjoyed his good fortune with equal liberality and prudence, searching out and employing such artists as possessed merit, and were in indigent circumstances; but when visited by a famous chemist, who told him he had nearly discovered the philosopher's stone, and wished him to become a partner in his good luck, Rubens, pointing to his palette and pencils, answered, he was come too late, for that, by the help of those instruments, he had himself found the philosopher's stone twenty years before.

In comparing Rubens with Titian, it has been observed, that the latter mingled his tints as they are in nature, that is, in such a manner as makes it impossible to discover where they begin or terminate: Rubens's method, on the contrary, was to lay his colours in their places, one by the side of the other, and afterwards very slightly mix them by a touch of the pencil. Now, as it is an acknowledged principle in the art, that the less colours are mingled, the greater their purity and vivacity, and, as every painter knows the latter method to be the most learned (requiring a deeper knowledge of the subject), to be attended with a greater facility, and, if properly managed, with greater truth and vivacity of effect, it must follow that this dif-

ference in their practice, which has been adduced to prove the inferiority of Rubens to Titian, indisputably proves the reverse; and, though it must be allowed perhaps that, in practice, he at times uncovered too much the skeleton of his system, and rendered his tints too visible for a near inspection, I can have no doubt that, on the whole, he was the most profound theorist; that more may be learnt from him respecting the nature, use, and arrangement of colours, than from any other master; and that, had he not been, in some measure, the dupe of his own powers, his name would have stood first in the first rank of colourists.

Rubens, like other men of his degree of eminence, produced a multitude of scholars and imitators, to whom he stood in the place of nature, and whose excellence can only be measured by their proximity to, or distance from, their great archetype. The best of their works are now probably, and not improperly, attributed to him, from whose mind the principle, that directed them, emanated. From him they learned to weigh the powers of every colour, and balance the proportion of every tint; but, destitute of his vigorous imagination, the knowledge of his principle became, in their hands, a mere palliative of mental imbecility, (leaves without trunk,) and served only to lacquer over poverty of thought and feebleness of design, and to impart a sickly magnificence to stale mythe-

logical conceits, and clumsy forms of gods without dignity, goddesses without beauty, and heroes without energy; which disgust the more, for the abortive attempt to conceal by colouring the want of that, which colour can never supply.

Such will always be the success of exclusive endeavours to copy the manner of a particular individual, however great his powers or name. The proper use of the study of our predecessors is to open and enlarge the mind, facilitate our labours, and give us the result of the selection, made by them, of what is grand, beautiful, and striking in nature. A painter, therefore, ought to consider, compare, and weigh in the balance of reason, the different styles of all distinguished masters; and, whatever mode of execution he may choose to adopt, his imitation should always be general, and directed only to what is truly excellent in each: he may follow the same road, but not tread in the same footsteps; otherwise, to borrow a metaphor from a celebrated artist of former days, instead of the child, he will be more likely to become the *grandchild* of nature.

**L E T T E R**

**ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF "THE TRUE BRITON,"**

**ON THE PROPOSAL**

**FOR ERECTING A PUBLIC MEMORIAL**

**OF**

**THE NAVAL GLORY OF GREAT BRITAIN.**



## LETTER, &c.

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SIR,

**H**AVING lately seen by the public papers, that it is in contemplation to erect a column, statue, or other monument, in honour of the British Navy, I trust it cannot be thought unbecoming in any man to offer his sentiments respecting the best mode of carrying so laudable a design into execution, and rendering it at the same time a monument of the good taste of the nation; as I suppose every man must feel, on such an occasion, that whatever, by meanness of conception, or clumsiness of execution, is disgraceful to the national taste, must be equally disgraceful to the glorious end in view, and reflect lasting dishonour, instead of credit, on its liberal supporters.

Attention to this point is the more necessary, as the



valour and superior dexterity of the British seamen have been felt, admired, and fully acknowledged, by the surrounding nations; but, it must be owned, we have not as yet been equally successful in impressing them with an advantageous opinion of British taste. Some advances, however, within a few years past, have been made, even in this respect; and the attention that has been paid us in consequence, should render us doubly cautious, and rouse us to redoubled energy, that we may not again fall into contempt—contempt, accompanied by insult and derision; for the watchful jealousy already excited by the progress of the arts, since the establishment of the Royal Academy, will not suffer a failure, in an object of so high a kind, to pass in mere silence and neglect.

Being a private individual, without rank, and without influence, I should not have dared to obtrude my thoughts on the public, but that I feel my full share of enthusiasm in the generous cause, and that, my line of study leading me to the immediate consideration of such subjects, I naturally imagined it possible that I might have more ideas rise on the occasion, than could readily offer themselves to every one; but far from presumptuously wishing to dictate to others, I only profess to throw out a few hints for the consideration of those who may have more judgment and taste than myself, and are more particularly engaged in the design; and happy shall I be, and think

myself amply rewarded for my trouble, if my conceptions should only be the means of exciting the attention, and drawing forth the ideas, of some one abler to do justice to the sublimity of the subject.

A work like that in question, in addition to durability in the materials, magnificence in the structure, and taste in the execution, ought to abound in sources of instruction and entertainment; it should be as interesting in itself, as it is, from the nature of its subject, capable of keeping curiosity always alive, and of being viewed with fresh admiration for a thousand years.

A column may at first surprise by its magnitude, and please by its beauty; but the uniformity of its impression on the sight, alike on all sides and at all times, must quickly render it uninteresting; and after a few ages of disregard, posterity may only view it as a quarry of materials for other edifices. A colossal statue might do more, in some respects, than a column, but in magnitude and effect it must be inferior; and the inhospitable climate, by wearing away the sharpness and delicacy of the workmanship, would prevent its being long considered as an object of attention, in point of taste; the ideas suggested by it would be of too refined and abstracted a nature to allow it to be very instructive, and it must at last partake too much of the uniformity of a pillar, to be capable of

affording that plenitude and succession of entertainment, which ought always to accompany great durability.

Having shown the insufficiency, in some points, of the plans already proposed, it remains now to consider how all the important and necessary qualities above mentioned can be combined. This, I conceive, may be effected by the adoption of the following scheme, in which the whole powers of the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture may be united; and what subject ever offered itself more worthy of such a combination!

What I would recommend, in preference to either a column or a statue, is—*First*, that on some convenient spot in the metropolis, a circular building should be erected, as nearly on the plan of the Pantheon at Rome as the different designation of it will allow, into which the light should be admitted through the dome, at or near the top. *Secondly*, that the whole internal circle should be divided into compartments, on which should be painted a certain number of the most brilliant victories and remarkable achievements, judiciously and carefully selected from the naval history of Great Britain, beginning from the remotest periods, and coming gradually down to the present day. *Thirdly*, that between every two of the pictures, against spaces left for that purpose, there should be placed one or more statues, of the size of life, of the greatest

heroes of the British navy who commanded in the actions represented on the adjoining canvasses, and to whose skill and intrepidity the success is chiefly to be attributed : that under the principal paintings there should be a smaller set, relative to our trade, commerce, colonization, discoveries, and other subjects connected with, and growing out of, the great power and prosperity of our Navy. *Fourthly*, that over the whole should be hung a series of half-length portraits of other great men and gallant officers, who, though not of the first class, have deserved well of their country. As this circle will be large, some space in it may be reserved for future claimants, yet perhaps unborn, who will not, we have every reason to hope, add less to the honour of their country, nor fall short of the celebrity of their glorious predecessors. *Fifthly*, that in the centre of the building, under the dome, there be placed a colossal group in marble, representing Neptune doing homage to Britannia ; and at the head of the room, a statue of his present majesty George the Third, in whose reign the British naval power has reached a point of exaltation, which seems to preclude the possibility of its being carried much higher by our successors.

I pretend not, nor indeed is this the time or place, to enter into the detail ; on that the architect, the painter, and the sculptor, must be consulted ; and happily the Royal Academy can supply, not one only, but many, in

each department of art, of ability fully equal to the great end proposed. It is sufficient here to remark, that *simpli-*  
*city* and *grandeur* should be the leading characteristics of  
the building and its decorations, both within and without.  
What an effect might a design like this, happily planned  
and executed, produce! How magnificent, how in-  
structive it might be made! How entertaining to trace  
down from the earliest records of our history, the gradual  
increase of our navy! to remark the different stages of  
its growth, from a few simple canoes in its infancy, to the  
stupendous magnitude of a hundred first-rate men of  
war! miracles of the mechanic arts, proudly bearing  
Britain's thunder! the bulwark of England! the glory of  
Englishmen, and the terror and admiration of the world!  
How flattering to the imagination to anticipate the plea-  
sure of walking round such an edifice, and surveying the  
different subjects depicted on its walls! Battles, under all  
the varied circumstances of day, night, moon-light, storm,  
and calm!—the effects of fire, water, wind, and smoke,  
mingled in terrific confusion! In the midst, British Valour  
triumphantly bearing down all opposition, accompanied  
by Humanity, equally daring and ready to succour the  
vanquished foe! Discoveries, in which we see delineated  
the strange figures, and still stranger costume, of nations  
till then unknown, and where the face of Nature itself is  
exhibited under a new and surprising aspect. Then to

turn and behold the statues and portraits of the enterprising commanders and leaders in the actions and expeditions recorded, and compare their different countenances; here a Drake and an Anson! there a Blake, a Hawke, a Boscawen, and a Cook!

In such a place, what man, or description of men, can fail to be interested? The philosopher, the man of genius, the man of taste, the naturalist, the physiognomist, the soldier as well as the sailor; in short, all conditions might resort here for study, or for amusement. Age might here find subject for pleasing meditation, and here youth might imbibe virtuous enthusiasm.

What a noble field for honourable contention would also be opened, by such an undertaking, to our artists of all denominations; and what might not be expected from their exertions, when equally operated upon by patriotism, grandeur and celebrity of subject, and personal emulation, who now produce so much, almost without encouragement, and without notice!

It is indeed the opinion of many persons of the highest consideration, that nothing but an opportunity of this kind is wanting, to enable them to rise as superior to the justly admired schools of Italy and Flanders, in the execution of their works, as they confessedly are already in the choice and composition of their subjects. If so, what would any of the boasted galleries and collections have

to offer in comparison of such an assemblage as is here proposed? and how deeply are not the policy and interest, as well as the honour, of the nation engaged in the furtherance of such a design!

I have been encouraged, Sir, to trouble you thus far with my sentiments, by the advice of several individuals of acknowledged judgement and taste, who are convinced, as well as myself, that no plan truly efficient and honourable in all points of view can be adopted, that partakes not in a great degree of what I have now proposed, which is of a nature so powerfully and generally interesting, that I doubt not it might be carried into effect to great advantage as a pecuniary speculation merely. The public exhibition, with the publication of a set of engravings of the work, would probably pay the expense of the whole, with considerable interest; and the nation would derive the benefit from it of being greatly enriched, at the same time that the rapid dispersion of the prints into all quarters of the globe, would contribute, more than can well be imagined or described, to give an exalted and universal impression of British valour, taste, munificence, and genius.

I am, Sir, with great respect,

JOHN OPIE.

THE END.

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